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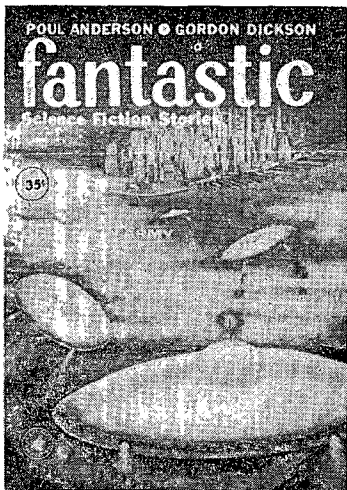
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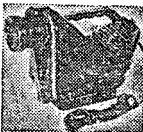
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E d i t o r i a l

THE publication of Henry Hasse's "We're Friends Now" in this issue is nostalgic in more ways than one. To our veteran readers. Hasse needs no introduction. To our newer aficionados, a bit of background may be interesting.

For instance, Hasse was one of the first writers ever published in *Amazing*. His first story appeared in the August, 1936, issue. It was called, "He Who Shrank," and it has since become one of the outstanding classics of science-fiction. It was one of the first stories to be based on the theme of the dwindling human. The vitality of "He Who Shrank" can perhaps be best testified to by revealing that this quarter-of-a-century old story has just been optioned for possible conversion into a motion picture.

* * * * *

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The little man stood in front of the monstrous machine as the synaptic drone heightened to a scream. No... no, he whispered. Don't you understand....

WE'RE FRIENDS, NOW

By HENRY HASSE

ILLUSTRATED by VARGA

TODAY more than other days Raoul Beardsley felt the burden, the dragging sense of inevitability. He frowned; he glanced at his watch; he leaned forward to speak to the copter pilot and then changed his mind. He settled back, and from idle habit adjusted his chair-scope to the familiar broad-spoked area of Washington just below.

"I'll not have it happening again today!" he told himself grimly . . . and at once his thoughts quavered off into many tangles of self-reproach. "Blasted nonsense the way I've been acting. A *machine*, a damned gutless machine like that! Why do I persist in letting it get to me?"

He pondered that and found no solace. "Delusion," he

snorted. "Hyper synapse-disorder . . . that's how Jeff Arnold would explain *me*. I wish he'd confine his diagnostics to the Mechanical Division where it belongs! He's amused, they're all amused at me—but damn it they just don't know!"

Beardsley's rotund body sagged at the thought. Adjusting the chair-scope, he fixed his gaze on the broad facade of Crime-Central Building far across the city; again he felt the burgeoning embarrassment and foreboding, but he put it down with an effort before it reached the edge of fear. *Not today*, he thought fiercely. *No, by God, I just won't permit it to happen.*

There. So! He felt much better already. And he had really made good time this



Beardsley was the only one not to panic when the infallible machine broke down.

morning. Today of *all* days he mustn't keep ECAIAC waiting.

Mustn't . . . Something triggered in Beardsley, and he was assailed with a perverse rebellion at the thought.

Must not? But why not? Why shouldn't he just *once* keep ECAIAC and Jeff Arnold and his clique stewing in their own tangle of tubes and electronic juice? And wouldn't *this*, he gloated, be the perfect day for it! Arnold especially—just once to shatter that young man's complacent routine . . .

No. Beardsley savored the thought tastily, and let it trickle away, and the look of glee on his cherubic face was gone. For too many years his job as serological "coördinator" (Crime-Central) had kept him pinned to the concomitant routine. Pinned or crucified, it was all the same; in crime analysis—as in everything these days, personal sense of achievement had been too unsubtly annihilated. Recalling his just completed task—the Citizen Files and *personatapes* and the endless annotating—Beardsley felt himself sinking still further into that mire of futility that encompassed neither excitement nor particular pride.

He brought himself back with a grimace, aware that he was clutching the briefcase of tapes possessively from long habit. The pilot had touched the news-stat, and abruptly one of the new "commerciappeals" grated on Beardsley's senses:

" . . . we repeat, yes, PROT-O-SUDS is now available in *flake* or *cake* or the new attachable *luxury-spray*. Remember, PROT-O-SUDS has *never* been laboratory-tested; it contains *no* miracle ingredients, *no* improved scientific formula, and NO LANOLIN. Then what is the new PROT-O-SUDS? I tell you frankly, friends, it is nothing but a lot of pure soft soap! Remember . . . we make no fabulous claims for PROT-O-SUDS . . . we assume that you are reasonably clean to start with! And now for your late breakfast news, PROT-O-SUDS takes you direct to the Central News Bureau for a final survey on the Carmack murder case . . ."

Beardsley groaned. New voice in the background, while the screen presented a slow montage. Cine-runs of the great Carmack himself, including those at the International Cybernetics Congress a year ago . . . survey of the murder scene, the Car-

mack mansion . . . close-up of ECAIAC . . . diagrammatic detail of ECAIAC . . . then dramatically, the grim and imposing figure of George Mandleco, Minister of Justice.

And then the news-caster's voice: ". . . certain that final processing will go forward today. It would be a gross understatement to say that the Carmack Case has captured the attention of the nation, both officialdom and public alike! *Never* in the history of Crime-Central has there been such an undercurrent of speculation and excitement . . ."

"Excitement?" murmured Beardsley.

"And now it is heightened, by no less an authority than the Minister of Justice himself, who brought both plaudits and censure upon himself today with the outright statement that *deep-rooted political issues* may well be involved. As you must know by now, it was the murdered man himself — Amos Carmack — who some years ago carried on the incessant lobbying that resulted in ECAIAC being accepted *pro bono publico* by Crime-Central. What devastating irony! For now it is ECAIAC itself that must weigh each detail, correlate all factors, probe every motive and machination leading

to the *murder of its creator* . . ."

"That's not entirely true, you know," muttered Beardsley.

Quick flicker, again a close-up of ECAIAC, and the drama-laden voice: "ECAIAC! Electronic Analysis Integrator and Computer. And now—an exclusive! From a very reliable source this reporter has learned that *three Primes* are involved . . ."

"Ha!" grated Beardsley.

" . . . and they will be broken down in quotient. Two must ultimately be eliminated—barring, of course, the possible emergence of any minor factor to status of Prime, which at this stage seems unlikely. It is estimated that by today or tomorrow at the latest Carmack's murderer will be brought to justice . . ."

Beardsley had taken as much as he could of this pseudo-factual mush. He jerked forward violently, rapped the pilot on the shoulder. "DAMN IT! WILL YOU SHUT THE DAMN THING OFF!"

He was immediately appalled at his outburst, and by the pilot's startled glance, but the stat went off immediately.

Beardsley leaned back muttering to himself. Carmack, Carmack! For seven weeks

now he had lived with it intricately and intimately, as the case shoved everything else right off the news-stat. People took the latest echoes to bed with them, commuters gobbled it with their breakfast cereal. Thank God today would see the end, and they could once more have the hot South Polar crisis with their cereal.

Seven weeks! He clutched the bulging briefcase with a wearisome horror. Twenty-two persona-tapes from Central File, all neatly processed and ready for ECAIAC. End result of the endless chart sifts, emphasis (as always!) on parietosomatic recession, the slow emergence of minor constants, the inexorable trend toward Price Factor and then *verification, verification*, to each his own, with all the subtle and shaded values of the Augment Index brought finally to focus on the relevance-graph *Carmack*.

Sure, thought Beardsley. A thing of augment-indexing and psych-tapes, quite without possibility of error. Now in the *old* days of crime detection—it might have taken them seven months instead of weeks, not to mention frustration and leg-work and false-leads and sweat, but—

His mouth pulled down bitterly. *Serological Coördinator. Glorified file-clerk is more like it. High-salaried errand-boy.*

"Here we are, sir!" The pilot's voice jarred him to reality as the copter berthed.

Beardsley hurried toward the roof entrance. His faded blue suit, a size too large, flapped about him, and the outmoded felt hat seemed to sink to the level of his thick-lensed glasses. The guard greeted him, but suppressed a smile as the cherubic little man flashed his official pass.

For there was something about Raoul Beardsley that eternally evoked amusement—an air of vacuous innocence and a remote forlornness. He gave the appearance of a person who sold shoes during the day, washed his wife's dishes at night and then solved two or three galacti-gram puzzles before turning off the light precisely at ten. Few, if any, remembered that this nervous little man had once been top Inspector of New York City's Homicide Bureau . . . but that was a dozen long years ago. Since then he had seen the antiquated detective methods of 1960 disappear, and he had died a little, too, seeing his Homicide Bureau relegated to a mere subsidiary with the growth of the Coördinate and

Mechanical Divisions. His appointment to Chief of Co-ordinants, Federal, was automatic and unquestioned; and Beardsley would have been the last to know, or to care, that he had correlated some eight million miles of serological data for the entrains of ECAIAC, a perfect record of not a single unsolved case.

And the penalty was in his eyes, if one cared to look beyond the thick-lensed glasses. No one ever did. They were remote eyes, a little bewildered, a little hurt . . . a mirror gone dull from times remembered but irretrievably lost.

Beardsley stepped onto the corridor sidewalk, coasted to the escalator and rode it down. Still immersed in his thoughts, he pushed into ECAIAC's room . . . *and again it happened.*

So shockingly sudden, there was not even time for remonstrance at himself. The feeling hit him as always before, straight and unerring, a surging impact that smashed forward and stopped him in his tracks, literally paralyzed.

He caught his breath convulsively. How often had he come here? And how often had this happened, even when he'd sworn he wouldn't let it? There was something about

the sight and sound and feel of ECAIAC that got to him, that seeped beneath flesh and bone and into his brain and sent his senses singing. Beardsley managed to gulp, as he observed the shiny black colossus that filled the entire length of the ninety-foot room; a dozen techs scurried around it, taking notes, attentive to the flashing lights in red-and-green and the faint clicking of thousands of relays that rose in susurrations.

But more than that arose. It was something that pervaded the room, not a pulsing but a *presence*, a sort of snapping intangible intelligence that reached beyond the audible and sheared at Beardsley's nerve-ends.

And it hadn't been there a moment before. That was the shocking thing. Beardsley knew that it *knew*! It was sentient, it was alive and aware and waiting, and it was listening.

As always, it knew that *he* had entered.

Beardsley gulped again, stood frozen for half a minute. None of the techs seemed to notice; they had often chided him about it, but he was used to that now. At last he broke the spell and made his legs move, feeling cold sweat as he hurried along the length

of ECAIAC toward Arnold's office.

There . . . just about there . . . by the rheostats, where the four red lights and the two green made a baleful pattern against the black metal skin. He felt it stronger than ever this time, something reaching and sinister aimed solely at him. He skirted the place with a quick goosey hop, stumbled a little and felt panic, but made it all right to the office.

Beardsley hated these moments. He was still trembling as he made a hurried entrance. Sure enough, as if on cue Jeff Arnold glanced up from his charts and grinned.

"Ah, good morning, Beardsley! Now don't tell me our pet goo — uh — snapped at you again?"

It was the routine remark, but today Arnold was immediately contrite for a change. "Sorry," he said, and a certain weariness replaced the grin. He gestured to the alcomech. "Can I dial you a drink? Feel in need of one myself!"

"Eleven-C," said Beardsley, and slumped into the pneumochair. Arnold rose and dialled 11-C, handed him the drink and dialled 9-R for himself. Sipping it, he moved around the desk.

There was something very strange and preoccupied in his movements, Beardsley thought, more than a mere tiredness. He had never seen Arnold this way.

"Yes sir, this is the day!" A muscle twitched in his corded neck; Arnold eased his long frame into a chair, rubbed thumb and forefinger at his eyes. "Been up half the night running off clearance tests. Can't afford to foul up on this one!"

Beardsley tossed off his drink and blinked at the fiery strength of it. Now why should Arnold say that? When had ECAIAC ever fouled up? He watched the man across the desk. Jeff Arnold was a vigorous, striking specimen, handsome in an athletic way, with long stubborn jaw and unhappy gray eyes beneath his unruly hair; the sort of face that intrigues women, Beardsley catalogued from past experience. And, he added, altogether too young a man to be operating a monster like ECAIAC.

Arnold indicated the empty glass. "Another?"

"No, I think not," Beardsley replied carefully.

Arnold hesitated, eyeing the briefcase in Beardsley's clutch. "It's been rough on

you, too, I imagine. Hope there aren't more than thirty variants! We're set up for more, of course, but it'll necessitate—"

"Twenty-two," Beardsley assured him. Carefully, he spread the coded and sealed *persona-tapes* across the desk. "Fresh from Citizen-File Augment, everything annotated and cross - checked. Blood-count, emotional stasis, plethora, psycho-geneological index, neuro-thalamic imbalance—every type factor is here. We really went to the Files on this case."

"Looks as if you did! How does it narrow down?"

"Fifteen possibles, four Logicals and three Primes—" Beardsley stopped abruptly. (That news-caster: how had he known there were three Primes? This stuff was not supposed to leak!) "Twenty-two who *knew* Carmack," he went on. "That includes associational as well as motive-opportunity factors, with a probability sphere of .004..."

Arnold nodded thoughtfully; his fingers moved unconscious and caressing across the edge of the desk. "Yes, I see. That's close! Good job," he said uncertainly.

"Should be! Seven weeks for annotation and code." Beardsley was watching Ar-

nold's fingers; there was something aimless and fretful as they pushed among the code-sealed tapes. Beardsley made his voice casual. "If it interests you," he said, "yes—you are there."

He wanted a reaction and he got it.

"Me!" Arnold stiffened, pulled his fingers away hastily.

"That surprises you? Don't worry, you're not one of the Primes; probably be rejected on the first run. It's just that you once knew Carmack rather well. Cal Tech, wasn't it, when Carmack was doing his special work on magnetronics? Naturally you've had contact since, due to the nature of your job."

Arnold nodded, frowning. "That's right. It just hadn't occurred to me that—"

Beardsley realized that he wasn't lying. *It was not the thought of his own tape that bothered Arnold.*

"Oh, we're thorough over at "Coördinates Division!" Beardsley laughed, making a minor joke of it. "Now here," he touched a spool labelled in red, "is your Basic Invariant. Carmack—Amos T. Murdered man. Found bludgeoned in library of his home, night of April 4. Age 56, held all out-

standing patents on ECAIAC, worth millions, and" — he looked up, beaming—"leaves beautiful wife."

He paused for the merest moment. Save for a soft drumming of fingers on the desk, Arnold was silent.

"And here's a sub-Basic: Mrs. Carmack will be a rich woman now. She was considerably younger than Carmack—and she's been having an affair with another man." Beardsley smiled at Jeff Arnold. "That's a sociological note beyond our sphere, but we managed to get the data. I'll bet the department was appalled that such a gorgeous woman could be resolved into neo-Euclidian equations!"

"Why?" Arnold was suddenly irritable. "It's been done a thousand times before!"

"Of course," shrugged Beardsley. "And it's really up to ECAIAC, isn't it? A Prime can be negated, while on the other hand a variant can shift from possible to Logical to Prime. Or am I wrong? I've never been up on the mechanics."

Arnold grunted. "There's bound to be some correlatory shift! The Primes—how many did you say?"

"Three as of now."

Arnold rose abruptly, then

strode to the alco-mech and dialled himself another drink. He took an uncommonly long time about it. "Look," he said, "we both know about these things! In a case like this there are bound to be political repercussions—" He hit Beardsley with a gauging glance. "Well," he blurted, "I have to admit I'm damn curious! Mind telling me who are the three Primes? Ah—strictly off the record, you understand."

Beardsley had expected something like this, and he was quite ready to answer; but he carefully removed his glasses, massaged the bridge of his nose and frowned. "Well, now . . ."

"Come on, give! I know it's against protocol and all that . . . but hell! We'll have the answer anyway in a matter of hours."

Beardsley nodded with a show of thoughtfulness. "Yes, that's true, isn't it? Very well. But strictly off the record! I warn you—not only will the first Prime startle you, but the information could be dangerous!"

He waited a moment, then he leaned forward and whispered: "Mandleco!"

For a moment Arnold didn't move. His face was ludi-

crous. Then Beardsley saw his hands clench.

"Mandleco!" the word jolted from his lips. "George Mandleco, Minister of Justice? I don't believe you!"

"It's a fact," Beardsley told him. "Right now he equates into an uncertain Prime."

"Yes, yes . . . but Mandleco! Good Lord . . ."

"I said *uncertain* Prime. As you mentioned yourself, there is sure to be a shift of variants. Surely you have faith in ECAIAC?"

"Of course! But Mandleco, why Mandleco?"

"Why not? He was a friend of Carmack's—or a business associate shall we say? He worked with Carmack on the ECAIAC lobby, was largely responsible for pushing it through."

"Yes, I—say, that's right! It would be in C-F . . ."

"There are things," murmured Beardsley, "in Central File that would astound you."

Arnold was staring at the coded tapes. "Mandleco," he breathed. "And with elections coming-up!" He shook himself out of the daze. "The—the other two Primes?"

"Next is not so startling. A really strong Recessive Factor there . . . Professor Karl Losch."

Arnold jerked erect sudden-

ly. "Losch? Say, I remember him! Now *there's* a man pursued by bad luck. He was working along similar lines to Carmack—in fact, wasn't he in Carmack's employ for a while?—but Carmack was first with the patents. You don't suppose that Losch—"

"I'm not supposed to suppose," Beardsley said softly. "But clinically, it is interesting to note that motive factor alone equates Losch from Logical into Prime. *Plus* a high neuro-thalamic imbalance—132 over 80 on the last Index, with pronounced efforts at suppression."

He watched Arnold absorb that, and went on: "Now for the third Prime. I think it'll interest you . . ."

He waited deliberately. He looked at Jeff Arnold for a long moment and saw that the man was calm. Too calm. So absolutely motionless that it wasn't real.

"Third Prime. A strong one, believe me. In a way most interesting of all." He pressed the words out slowly and flatly. "The third Prime," said Beardsley, "is . . . Pederson."

He watched Arnold relax ever so slowly, leaning back, the tension going away as he uncoiled in the chair; but the young man's face wasn't so

much relieved as it was puzzled.

"Pederson. Pederson? I don't seem to— You can't mean *Brook* Pederson, the one-time tele-columnist?"

"None other. I don't suppose you remember, but back in '60 he opposed the ECA-IAC lobby. I mean *opposed* it, *fought* it! Predicted that Government installation of such a machine would not inspire confidence, that the nation's crime rate would rise . . . he saw nothing but chaos. For a while there he was quite a man. Got himself a following. Had ambitions."

"But I do remember it!" Arnold thumped the desk. "Of course! Pederson headed a bloc against 'Carmack's Folly,' but he backed the wrong horse, and when the bubble burst he was out in the cold. Became a laughing stock." Arnold paused, and his glance held something of shrewdness and a livening challenge. "Actually, Pederson couldn't have been more wrong. In those first two years ECAIAC reduced the crime-rate by some forty percent."

"So it's claimed!" This was a sore point and Beardsley rose to the bait. "It couldn't be that crime was on the down-grade already? I could

show you plenty of statistics that—why, I could show you methods—"

"I'll just bet you could." Arnold gave a thin tolerant smile. "I refuse to enter *that argument* again, not with you, Beardsley. I for one trust in machines not in evolution. I've told you before . . ."

And Beardsley found himself sitting there with a flush of heat at his hair-roots, half-angry and half foolish as he realized how he had been baited.

Jeff Arnold was abruptly all business. He plunged his finger at a button, spoke into the intercom. "Joe! How's that test-run coming?"

"All-X so far! Give us ten minutes for clearance."

"Take twenty, but make sure it's *clearance*. Checked Quantitative, have you? How about feed-backs? . . . yes . . . what's that? Semantic circuits! Hell yes, check *all* synaptics for clearance! I want no excess data fouling up this run!"

He clicked off and sat there moodily, and Beardsley watched him, noting the quick nervous rhythm of Arnold's fingers. Arnold noticed it, too, and desisted.

"Look," he said. "Mandleco, Losch, Pederson. Those three

Primes just don't make sense to me!"

"They don't?" Beardsley allowed just the proper note of resentment. "Surely you are not questioning Coördinates . . ."

"You know I'm not! But—"

Beardsley waited, knowing it was coming now. The thing Arnold had been aching to voice for the past five minutes.

"But—well, damn it, there is Mrs. Carmack, for example. As you pointed out yourself, she'll be a rich woman now! It would seem to me—"

"That she'd be a Prime? I'm surprised at you, Jeff; that's ancient thinking." If there was a trace of sarcasm, it was lost on Arnold. "Oh, I grant you it used to hold true—principle beneficiary was always prime suspect. Fiction especially was full of it. Queen, Dickson Carr, Boucher you—know the ilk. But with ECAIAC we've gotten away from all that, haven't we?"

Arnold stared at him suspiciously, hesitated, then brought it out with an effort. "Well—how *did* she equate?"

"Who? Oh yes, the beautiful widow. She only made Logical, and even that is borderline."

"I see." Arnold rose, dialled himself another drink,

then changed his mind and put it down untouched. He turned to gather up the tapes, and his voice was apologetic.

"It's not that I'd ever questioned Coördinates Division! We're too closely aligned for that, Raoul . . ." (*First time he's ever used my first name*, thought Beardsley.) "You have a splendid record to uphold, as we do here at Mechanical. That's why . . . well, I want to get this off as smoothly as possible!"

Something indefinable, a queasy feeling, took Beardsley about the middle. He said sharply: "Any reason why not?"

"No, not really. But in recent weeks—I tell you this in strictest confidence, understand!—in recent weeks it's been a rather ticklish thing to get total synaptic clearance."

Synaptics? Beardsley began thinking back to the Crime-Central "Required Annual Basic." The Mechanical had never been his strong point. He said uncertainly, "But—that's serious!"

"It's just that we've found ECAIAC holding back excess data from previous runs. Fouls up the relays, takes hours to iron out the clearance." Arnold gave him a keen look. "More of a nuisance

really, but the weirdest thing. Stubborn!"

Stubborn. Beardsley could have thought of a better word. Through the panelled glass he glimpsed the black metal sheathe of the monster out there, the shapeless crouching and malevolent winking lights, and he felt himself going to pieces inside with a sudden shaking crumble; he hated himself for it but he couldn't stop it; his hands clenched until the knuckles showed white.

"... matter of time until we find the cause," Arnold was saying, but I guarantee total clearance *today*. Shall we get on with it?" Hands loaded with tapes, he moved for the door.

"No!" Beardsley cried. "Arnold, if you don't mind, I—"

"Oh, for God's sake, not again! Raoul, I swear I'm going to do something about this phobia of yours; it's getting to be not so funny any more." With a show of exasperation, Arnold propelled him through the door. "I give you my absolute word our pet won't snap at you. Not today. It's going to be far too busy for the likes of you!"

And Jeff Arnold was right, Beardsley discovered. Those

baleful overtones were gone, replaced by a sustained soft whisper along the ninety-foot hull—a rather impatient whisper but not at all unpleasant. Beardsley relaxed by slow degrees, but kept a cautious distance, while Arnold pointed out every light along the length flashing green for Total Clearance.

"She's rarin' to go," said Arnold with a display of good humor, "but we'll let her wait a while, eh?" He clapped a friendly arm across Beardsley's shoulder. "You just come along now and watch; I think you're trouble is, you've never been properly introduced! We'll have no more of this feudin' and fussin' between you and ECAIAC."

So Beardsley, showing more courage than he felt, trailed the cyberneticist through every unit of final check-up. Much of it he knew already from the "Required Annual Basic"... or thought he knew. For this was so different from the Manuals! He felt at once ashamed and awed as he viewed at first hand the unfolding schematic structure. He was thrilled at sight of the selectors and analyzers of processed beryllium, the logic-and-semantic circuits in complex little bundles, the sensitized variant-tapes waiting for

transferral impress, all revealed by a flick of Arnold's fingers that threw open entire sheathed sections to bare the inner secrets. The thousands of tiny transistors amazed Beardsley. The endless array of electric eyes startled him. And the spongy centers of synaptic cell-clusters horrified him, recalling too vividly to mind what he knew of the physical human brain.

Along the monstrous length he trailed Jeff Arnold; he trailed and he watched and he listened, not interfering once by word or gesture. And before it was over his heart was surging with a great revelatory beat because suddenly *he knew . . . he knew . . .*

Arnold seemed in high good humor as they paced back. "So," he nudged Beardsley in the ribs, "we'll have no more of this nonsense between you and ECAIAC. Eh? You're just *bound* to be good friends now."

Beardsley didn't answer. The revelation was still too much with him. He watched as Arnold conferred with a group of his techs about a micro-chron, and the time was carefully noted for Central Record.

Then the first of the tapes went in. The Basic Invariant —Amos Carmack.

It reached synapse and a tiny blip registered on cue.

The rest of the tapes fed in, razoring through the rollers, past the selenic-sensitized tips of the relays. There was no progressive order. After the Basic Invariant progression didn't matter. Possible or Logical or Prime, all factors would correlate or cancel; any divergent status-shift would be duly handled by transferal impress.

Beardsley counted the tapes. Twenty . . . twenty-one . . . twenty-two.

The techs dispersed, taking up their various posts where special eject-tapes clicked out a second-by-second record of the progression.

Nothing much happened. The sound of ECAIAC became a steady inundant drone; or did Beardsley just imagine that he detected something of the *gleeful* in it? With an effort he put the thought from him, and keeping a cautious distance he took a turn around the monster, up one side and down the other.

He stopped by Jeff Arnold, who was jotting down figures from the chrono. That seemed silly, as nothing had happened yet.

Arnold glanced up and grinned at him, as if totally

unconcerned that this was the most repercussive case in the entire history of Crime-Central! A little disconcerted, Beardsley said, "What happens first?"

"Oh, plenty is *happening*. But the first you'll notice will be a total reject. Watch when that happens. Complete silence, every light red for exactly two and a half seconds—the reject, and then everything continues."

"How about Transferral Impress? You know—possible to Logical, or Logical to Prime?"

Arnold paused over his notes for the merest instant. "Why—it's progressive, of course. *That* you won't notice!"

Beardsley stared at him curiously, started to speak and then changed his mind. He wandered again, watching the techs but not interfering. And suddenly he was aware that the first total reject had come. It happened with smooth and sudden silence just as Arnold had described, ECAIAC breaking pace for mere seconds . . . then all was clear again, and one of the techs hurried down the aisle with the tape, which he handed to Arnold.

Beardsley was aware of a

wild pounding of pulse as he stared at the anonymous tape. One of the fifteen "possibles"? It might even be a rejected Logical. Mrs. Carmack? She was borderline. Or a Prime! It could be Mandlecó himself—or Losch or Peder-son. No . . . it was unlikely any Primes would fall this early . . .

But maybe they were no longer Primes! Maybe *right now* Transferral Impress was at work, maybe one or more of them was being relegated to lower coördinate-status somewhere there in the en-trails . . .

He felt a bounding excitement. And, as if reading his thoughts, Jeff Arnold gave him an amused look.

"Don't let it get to you, Raoul. I used to find it the same; we all do. But then you get to thinking, hell, why try to guess? Identities don't matter now!" He indicated the coded tape. "A total reject—anonymous. ECAIAC's way of telling us *that* person could not possibly be the murderer."

"But—you're not even curious?"

"At rejects? Why?" Arnold seemed perplexed. "Oh, you mean because *I'm* among the 'possibles.' Frankly it doesn't bother me. I know I'm not the murderer, and I have

faith in ECAIAC. If this isn't my tape, the next will be—or the eighth, or the fifteenth."

Beardsley nodded slowly. With ECAIAC it was only the final equate that mattered, the total result of Cumulative. He saw the truth in that, and the perfection. Or—his eyes beneath the glasses came to a quick bright focus—*was* it quite perfection? He watched in silence as Arnold consulted the micro-chron and jotted more notes. *Ref. Q-9 (code): (.008 synap. circ.): 11:23 A.M.*

Beardsley wandered again, watching the techs. A sudden shivering seized him. How could they remain so calm? Were they so close to the forest they couldn't notice? Something was about to happen . . . to him it was unmistakable, in the very atmosphere, sharpened and heightened by the four walls—a pervading sense of *wrongness* and a pyramiding tension.

Even Arnold wasn't aware; *audibly* nothing had changed, as ECAIAC continued its soft-clicking whisper and the techs methodically checked the progress tapes. Beardsley stood numbly for a moment, struggling against a welter of panic. Palms sweating, he moved a safe distance away and waited.

Eight minutes later came another reject. Six minutes later, the third. ECAIAC continued its blithe, soft-throated rhythm—but Beardsley was not fooled.

Someone sent out for coffee. It arrived in steaming thermocontainers. Beardsley was on his first cup of coffee when rejects 4, 5 and 6 came through.

He was on his second cup when number 7 ejected, and he had just taken a last swallow when all hell broke loose.

It wasn't much different from the other rejects. Total silence, every light in every section red . . . trouble was, they couldn't seem to get together again. Some went back to green, others blinked with ominous uncertainty, still others said "to hell with it" and exploded in vicious shards of glass that sprayed across the room! That was only the beginning. Twenty feet from Beardsley came a louder explosion, a sort of muffled hissing. He ducked, as a complete bank of transistors zoomed past his head. From a dozen places along the ninety-foot length angry trails of smoke poured out. A tech yelled "Damn!" as he pulled back a burned hand. Sheathes crashed open. Long strands of varicolored wire burst out and be-

gan a crazy aimless writhing, accompanied by an ominous buzzing sound as if a swarm of angry metallic bees had escaped. Someone was yelling, "Master-switch! The master-switch!"

Beardsley saw Arnold leap to the master-switch, where he became entangled with a tech who was screaming at him, "My God, sir, hurry! It's BREAKDOWN!"

Cursing, Arnold shoved the man aside and pulled the controls.

But now that it was roused, ECAIAC didn't want to give up so easily. There came a staccato series of minor explosions — defiant gesture, thought Beardsley! — before silence engulfed the room together with a drift of acrid smoke.

It was acrid and *angry* smoke. From a safe distance Beardsley adjusted his glasses and observed the frantic, scurrying techs, many of them nursing burned hands. Aside from a pounding heart he was amazed at his own calm; nevertheless, he tread with caution as he approached Arnold, who was on his haunches dolefully surveying the area of major damage.

"Uh—is it something serious?"

Arnold glared up at him.

"Overload on the feed-backs. If that's *all* it is, we can pull out the unit and replace it in a few hours."

"Never happened before, eh?"

"Not like this," Arnold groaned. "Lord—it just seemed to go berserk!"

Beardsley glanced around nervously. "You see? You see? I didn't think our beautiful friendship could last . . ."

Arnold snarled, "Get out, Beardsley! What the hell you doing here anyway? Go somewhere and read a book!"

"Yes. Yes, I—" Beardsley swallowed hastily. He then straightened, took a last look around and pulled himself together. Without a word, he turned and strode resolutely into Jeff Arnold's office; he closed the door carefully, then hurried over to the stat and pushed the button for priority.

"Hello," he said. "Mandleco's office? . . . this is Mechanical Division . . . no, I want *Mandleco* . . . I don't care, get him I said! This is emergency! Put him on at once!"

Mandleco arrived twenty minutes later. The Minister of Justice was tall and rawboned with a long hook-nose, a shock of whitening hair, and more than a suggestion of

military arrogance. He paused for precisely one second in the doorway, then strode straight over to Jeff Arnold. Before saying a word he bent slightly and peered into the maze of mechanism.

Beardsley wanted to say, "Do you find the cause of the trouble, sir?" But he held his tongue.

Mandleco straightened up, glaring. "Arnold, what is the meaning of this?"

"Breakdown, sir."

"I can see that! The cause, man, the cause!"

"I—it's only the feed-back, sir." Arnold struggled with the terminals, most of which were a fused and tangled mess. "Not as bad as it looks, I assure you. I've already contacted Maintenance; they're sending up a new unit."

"What precisely does that mean? Can you complete the run or not! This has got to go through today!"

Arnold touched a hot terminal, jerked back his hand and swore. "It will, sir. Give us a few hours. We had seven total rejects, so I doubt the tapes are at fault. More like a synaptic overload. Transferrals are okay, so I want to try it with a stepped-up synaptic check; that'll alleviate any overload without drain on the minor selective, which is bet-

ter than setting up complete new correlation-grams."

It was too much for Mandleco. Grinding a fist in his palm, he stared into the matrix and muttered, "Unprecedented. Absolutely unprecedented! Arnold, I just can't understand *why*—"

"Happened pretty suddenly," Beardsley intruded. His voice was low and laden with meaning. "Almost as if it had gone berserk! And little wonder, if you ask me . . ."

Mandleco turned quickly. "Eh? What do you mean?"

"Well . . . how would *you* feel if you had just been handed the news, out of the blue, that someone you loved had been brutally murdered? ECAIAC reacted, is all. She must have regarded Carmack as a father—"

Arnold looked up in amazement. "Beardsley, will you stop that crazy nonsense!"

"Nonsense?" Beardsley appeared hurt. "Why—you said yourself that you wanted me and ECAIAC to become great friends!" He appealed to Mandleco. "That's what he said, sir, and he even took pains to introduce me and all, and—"

"It was in the nature of a joke, sir!" Arnold's voice rose an octave. "A private little

joke, and he's trying to make it appear—"

"Stop it, stop it!" Mandleco thundered. "Arnold—you get that new unit installed on the double! Put your best men on it. That's an order! Beardsley, I'm glad you had the presence of mind to contact me. Commendable, most commendable."

Arnold scowled, hit Beardsley with an accusing look.

"Above all," said Mandleco, "not a word of this must leak! *Damn* it, why should this have to happen *now*? Public confidence will be undermined if they think ECAIAC is—"

"Not infallible?" suggested Beardsley.

"Exactly. You hear me, Arnold? Not a word of this must get out!"

"I'm sure it won't," Arnold glared venomously at Beardsley, "if you'll just keep *him* away from the tele-stats."

The Minister of Justice walked away, still muttering something about public confidence and political repercussions. Beardsley kept pace beside him until they were across the room. Then he spoke, timidly at first.

"Pardon me, sir, but—I'd like to ask you something." His voice was low and confi-

dential. "If you'll just look around you . . ."

"Eh?" Mandleco followed Beardsley's gesture, and for the first time he seemed to see the room in total. Shards of glass lay everywhere. A great tangle of wire was strewn half the length of ECAIAC, and a bank of transistors reposed against the far wall in pitiful ruin. The techs had already started a strip-down, their tools and units across the floor adding to the general confusion.

Mandleco said, "Well? What is it you—" His words stopped as if sliced in two by his teeth. "Yes. Yes, by God, I see what you mean!"

"Can you really conceive of operation in two hours?" *Two hours*, Arnold said. Two days, maybe. More likely in two weeks!"

Mandleco groaned as if in pain, staring around.

Beardsley pressed his point. "You'll pardon my saying it, sir, but I *do* realize what the Carmack Case means—to you personally. So much build-up and publicity, and the people demanding a verdict . . . why, if the case were to snag now—"

"Unthinkable!" A shudder touched Mandleco's long, lean frame. "Out with it, man! What are you trying to say?"

Beardsley was suddenly sweating. He felt as if a long tube were inside of him, hot and throbbing, reaching up with a surge of pulse to his temples. *It had to be now. He had to say it.*

"Well," he gulped. "Just this, sir. I think the case can be cracked right now. Today. *Without ECAIAC.*"

"Nonsense! Without ECAIAC? Why, that's—"

"Sure. You think it's crazy. But I tell you *I can do it!*" Beardsley's words came fast and urgent. "I've followed this case from the beginning, I processed it, I'm familiar with every angle. I tell you, *I can deliver the killer.* Give me permission to try!"

Mandleco stared at Beardsley as if he were some queer specimen under a microscope; his mouth opened to speak, then he clamped his teeth tightly and strode away.

He turned back abruptly. "So you think you have the solution. You actually—do—think it!" His eyes narrowed down, no longer amused, as he fixed the little serologist with a peculiar gaze. "Go on, Beardsley. Your suggestion at least has the novelty of imagination!"

"The novelty of experience," Beardsley said bitterly. "*With your permission and*

co-operation I can solve this case, together with positive evidence that will hold up in any court! What's more, I'll do it today. A guarantee," Beardsley said pointedly, "which I dare say you no longer have from ECAIAC."

Mandleco stood quite motionless, trying to recall something. "Now I remember! You were with New York Homicide, weren't you, before promotion to Coördinates in '60? I recall passing on your record. Top record, too, for those days."

Beardsley gestured impatiently. "How about it, sir? I know every pertinent fact of this case, plus a few of my own which haven't been tested in a dozen years. Not indexes and tubes and tapes—just facts! Fact and method! Let me apply them!"

"I'm afraid it's not as simple as that, Beardsley. There *is* ECAIAC, and public confidence must not be allowed—"

"The public be damned" Beardsley caught himself. "All right—for appearance sake you can say the solution *came* from ECAIAC. Let ECAIAC verify me later if you wish. I'm not after headlines and glory . . . by heaven, sir, I'm offering you an *out!*"

Mandleco pondered that. He

glanced again at the confusion across the room, and realization seemed to hit him. Quite suddenly, then, he threw back his head and roared with laughter.

"An out. And by heaven, Beardsley, I'm offering you a try! The idea appeals to me! Beardsley versus ECAIAC . . . socio-archaism opposed to the *machina-ratiocinatrix*. Why, it's delicious!" He subsided to a rumble of mirth and wiped tears from his eyes. "So! Just what do you propose?"

Beardsley saw nothing amusing. "I propose first, sir, that we reach an understanding. I'm to conduct the investigation my own way, without interference?"

"You have my word! I never violate it."

"Good. Then start using your word right now. There are three persons I want placed in temporary custody; they are to be brought over here at once for questioning."

Mandleco looked appalled. "Questioning? *Here?*"

"Yes, right here. Immediately! The three I want are Mrs. Carmack—I happen to know she's still in the city. And Brook Pederson—you should reach him easily at Central News Bureau. The third—"

"Would that be Professor Losch?" Mandleco smugly asked. "Sorry, but Losch happens to be in Bermuda right now."

Beardsley said sharply: "How did you know that?"

"Why, I—I'm acquainted with Losch, you know. He was planning a vacation, and he mentioned Bermuda—"

"No. I don't mean that. *How did you know Losch was my third person?*"

Mandleco bristled a little, his face reddening as he groped for an answer. "Never mind," Beardsley waved it aside. "If Losch is in Bermuda at present we'll reach him by tele-stat right now!" He was suddenly crisp as he propelled the Minister of Justice toward Jeff Arnold's office.

Mandleco stared at this little man, wondering if it were the same person he had been talking to just minutes before. "Now see here, Beardsley—" But he was interrupted.

"I thought we had an understanding! Of course, if you'd prefer to count on ECAIAC—"

"Very well," Mandleco nodded grimly, "I gave you my word. But the instant Arnold repairs the breakdown, your little experiment is over! Do you understand that?"

Beardsley nodded. He understood very well.

"In the meantime, Beardsley, I warn you. I'll have no brow-beating of these citizens, no—what was it called—third-degreeing tactics! I understand that sort of thing used to be pretty prevalent."

Beardsley snorted, as if that were beneath comment, and closed the office door behind them. Mandleco hit him with a cagey glance. "The Logicals and the Primes, eh? I suppose you know that I happen to be one of those Primes."

Beardsley looked straight at him. "Yes, I'm aware of it. My own approach will be individualistic, of course, but I promise you won't be over-looked!"

It might have been fatal—but Beardsley had judged his man well. Mandleco took it as a challenge. He was silent as he approached the tele-stat, and he no longer seemed amused.

He put through the directive to have Mrs. Sheila Carmack and Mr. Brook Pederson brought in. "As my guests, that is," Mandleco told his operative. "*Be sure they understand that.* They are to be brought to Crime-Central, Mechanical Division, at once

... yes, I said Mechanical Division! At once means now."

Beardsley nodded approval. "And now Professor Losch, please?"

Without a waste of motion, Mandleco put through to Bermuda on priority beam. While they waited he gave Beardsley a look of puzzlement and new respect. "Ah—I'm not implying that it's against protocol, of course, but I assume you've already made some investigation along lines of your own?"

"Superficial only," Beardsley said.

"I see. Well then, would you mind giving me some . . . you know, just an idea of how you plan to proceed?"

Beardsley said bluntly: "Yes, I would mind."

"Oh." Mandleco frowned and persisted. "Psychologic deduction. Wasn't that your *forte*? I seem to recall—"

Beardsley grunted. "I'll tell you this much, there are implications about this case that fascinate me!"

"Oh?" Mandleco found himself a chair, sat upon it and edged forward. "I don't just quite—"

"Look. To begin with, the case is unique; so much so that your entire structure of approach is wrong. I mean

top-heavy! Top-heavy with gadgetry and assumption."

"Assumption?" Mandleco bristled a little. "You of all people should know better. Not *once* in the past dozen years has ECAIAC failed to arrive at a conclusive and pin-point solution based on correlative factors!"

Beardsley smiled thinly. "Ah, yes. But we were speaking of the *Carmack* case. I repeat, it's not only unique but untenable; it became untenable the moment you assigned ECAIAC the task of solving the murder of its own creator! That," he said grimly, "is a mistake we wouldn't have made even in '60 . . ."

Mandleco thought that over, shook his head and frowned. It was obvious he missed the connotation. "So?" he urged.

"So look at the murder itself. The *pattern*. You'll admit it does seem odd and misplaced for these times—or hadn't you noticed?" Beardsley leaned forward sharply. "But it strikes a familiar note with me! Absolutely nothing in the way of material clues; not even the weapon; and the *modus operandi* is one I haven't seen employed in years, the old idea of the most direct and simple murder being the safest!"

"I—I guess I just don't follow you."

"I mean the *way* Carmack was struck down. Nothing cute and fancy, no frills or improvisation—just the proverbial blunt instrument, after which the killer simply walked out of there. Believe me, I know about these things. The very simplicity is the killer's protection. You can bet no trace will ever be found of that blunt instrument, and naturally he left no evidence coming or going. But then," Beardsley said obliquely, "your so-called 'Survey' men made a horrible botch of the scene. In '60 we'd have sent them back to patrolling the freeways!"

Mandleco started to protest, then closed his mouth quickly. "I see, I see."

"I can understand," Beardsley murmured, "how emphasis on basic groundwork has become minimized. So much reliance on Indexes and thalamic-imbalance and chart-sifts! It was only a matter of time until a criminal, a really *clever* one, saw through the system—and reverted." His fingers drummed the chair arm, then he looked up sharply. "And yet of all places, I'd say that Carmack's estate was *least* ideally situated for this type of murder; you know

what I mean? You've been there?"

"Well, I—there have been occasions. Yes."

Beardsley nodded. "I refer to Carmack's elaborate system against invasion of his privacy. To put it bluntly, he had enemies, and his estate was designed as a refuge against those enemies; electronic barriers pitched at ultra-frequency to respond only to certain neural vibrations. Must have taken years of research to come up with that!"

Mandleco shifted impatiently. "Of course, but look here, Beardsley—"

"So it leaves me right where I started, doesn't it? And yet I know this: it was no *emotional* killing. It was all coldly planned. The killer was someone Carmack trusted enough to have in his home; they were probably having a quiet little chat together. And then precisely—on a predetermined minute—the killer rose from his chair and struck."

Mandleco lifted his heavy hands and then, as if conscious of them, let them fall limply across the desk. "But—come now, Beardsley! Psychologic deduction is all very well, but how can you possibly know that?"

Beardsley gazed calmly at the Minister of Justice. For a

moment he said nothing. Mandleco seemed more alert than startled, more annoyed than either.

"That," said Beardsley softly, "I am not prepared to tell you."

Mandleco seemed about to pursue the point, but there came an interruption. Both men turned abruptly as the stat-screen gave its warning blip.

"Code C-C-Five!" came the remote voice. "Bermuda to Washington, Priority. This is Priority. C-C-Five . . . your party is ready now, sir!"

It was a pool-side scene, with hotel and tropical palms against an unbelievable blue sky. Professor Emil Losch loomed on the screen; he was in swimming trunks, a small gray man who seemed hard as nails, his lean tanned body belying his years.

"Hello?" Losch peered sharply and then pulled away, almost upsetting an expensive decanter of liquor on the table beside him. He seemed to blanch as he recognized the Minister of Justice. "Mandleco!"

The latter raised a hand in greeting. "Don't be alarmed, Professor, this is not official. Just a social call."

"I want to correct that,"

Beardsley said bluntly as he thrust himself into range. "Professor Losch, this is official; furthermore, I wish to advise you that this stat is monitor-taped for both vis and audio, and the resulting record is therefore admissible in any Court of Law. Being so advised, is there any objection on your part to answering a brief series of questions pertaining to the Carmack Case? I have been duly authorized by George Mandleco, Minister of Justice," he added for the record.

Losch glanced bewilderedly from Beardsley to Mandleco, and seemed to take courage from the latter.

"Objection?" he said. "This is a bit unusual, but . . . of course, I have no objection."

"Very well. I shall make a series of statements, and give you opportunity to refute them either in part or *in toto*. Professor Losch, some years ago you were engaged privately, in magnetronic cybernetic research along similar lines to those later developed by Amos Carmack. Shortly thereafter you claimed that Carmack had thwarted you, out-manuevered you, *out-stolen* you at every turn; I believe those are pretty much your own words, as revealed by court records—"

"Correct! I repeat them now!"

"You filed against him, and litigation dragged through the courts for several years before Carmack finally won out. Shortly thereafter you disappeared; I believe you took up residence in Europe. About a year ago you returned, and was hired as Research Consultant in the laboratories of the Carmack Foundation. This is true?"

For a moment Losch avoided looking at the screen. It was obvious he was considering his answer carefully.

"It's true," he said.

Beardsley said quickly, "It is my understanding that Mr. Mandleco interceded with Carmack on your behalf—"

"I protest the last statement!" Losch's words exploded from the screen. "There was no intercession by anyone!" His head lifted defiantly. "Yes, I came back. I don't mind admitting I came crawling back. Carmack offered me the position and I accepted!"

"Quite so. And he offered you a hundred thousand a year, didn't he? Twice the salary of any other top man?"

"You think that's out of line," Losch bristled, "but he must have thought I was worth it—I think you know

why! He owed me ten times as much!"

"You must have really hated Carmack," murmured Beardsley.

Mandleco thrust forward angrily, gesturing. "Losch, let me caution you not to answer that!"

"But I will answer it! Yes, I hated him, but if you think I killed the man you're wrong. Sure—I wanted to kill him—I thought about it often enough, but I hadn't the courage." Losch glared at Beardsley from the screen. "No doubt my Augment Index will bear it out," he said bitterly. "Neuro-thalamic imbalance isn't it called? Pronounced efforts at emotional suppression?"

"Close enough," Beardsley nodded, refusing to be enticed from his query. "And you were in Washington prior to and including the day of the murder. You admit this?"

"Of course, of course I admit it!" Losch sighed wearily and lifted his hands. "Why deny the obvious? I'm resigned to the fact that my Index probably makes me a prize Prime!"

"Professor Losch. As a person closely associated with the Carmack Laboratories, you must be aware of the—shall we say—elaborate precau-

tions Carmack took to ensure his privacy?"

Losch sank back slowly, but his eyes couldn't conceal a livening interest. "I don't know what you mean."

"Then I'll tell you. I refer to the frequency barrier which Carmack installed within the past year. The 'neuro-vibe' I think he called it. That strikes a note?"

Losch said sullenly, "Perhaps! What about it?"

"Only this. Assuming the killer was a person Carmack had reason to mistrust—or to fear—he had to solve the neuro-vibe in order to gain access. Not many persons could have done that, Losch. But *you* could have done it."

Losch came up out of his chair with a heavy, angry look. "Now see here, you—"

"Which pretty well establishes motive, means and method. You were in Washington the day of the murder! And you left for Bermuda the day following! Is that substantially correct?"

"*Totally* correct!" said Losch savagely. "Now may I ask what the hell you're going to do about it?"

Beardsley observed him for a prolonged second. "Remember it," he answered softly.

Losch opened his mouth to

say more, but Beardsley lifted a palm at the screen and smiled benignly. "Well, sir, I think that about covers it. I want to thank you very much for the record, and—ah—have a nice vacation! Good-bye."

With that he clicked off abruptly.

He turned to face Mandleco, who was struggling between anger and distress as he paced away from the screen and back. He confronted Beardsley with a sad and accusing look. "Now see here, Beardsley! If I'd known your methods were . . . don't you think that was all a bit high-handed?"

"What? No, not in the least. Didn't you notice?"

"Notice what?"

"Losch was an angry man, yes, indeed."

"Angry," snapped Mandleco. "Good reason!"

"No," Beardsley mused. "The *wrong* reason. Murder—at least the type we're concerned with—is a form of release, you know. A killer may commit his deed in anger, but once the thing is accomplished he never retains that anger long." Beardsley gazed contemplatively at the screen. "You know, I admire that man. I really do. He had the

convictions at least, if not the courage."

Mandleco pounced on that. "Then you think Losch is innocent?"

"I didn't say that!" Beardsley paused in a strange hesitation; his eyes had gone remote beneath the very thick glasses, and his words came slow and isolated. "But he's part of the record. Yes, it should be quite a record. In fact, I have a feeling—you know?—that this case is going to stand as a *monument* in the annals of crime . . ."

Mandleco stared at him, searched for the meaning there and then gave it up. *Why had he ever committed himself to this situation anyway? Did this little man really know as much as he pretended, or was he merely fumbling around in the dregs of a forgotten past?* To be sure, Beardsley was a pathetic enough figure; but the man had once been great in his field, and there was something about him even now . . .

There was the sudden way Beardsley had of losing his abstracted look, the eyes beneath those ridiculous lenses coming to a sharp bright focus with tiny livening flecks in the gray of the iris; and the way the change lifted his features from mediocrity to

the alertness of a terrier. It was absurd, it was farcical . . . and it was all very disturbing.

"You told *me*," Mandleco said testily, "that the killer was someone Carmack trusted enough to have in his home. Then you bludgeon Losch with the idea it was a person Carmack had reason to fear! It would seem to me, Beardsley—"

"No, no. I think my words to Losch were *assuming* the killer was such a person." Beardsley looked up brightly, and even through those lenses Mandleco could see the sharp focus.

"Just the same, I fail to see what's to be gained by these outlandish methods!"

Beardsley seemed genuinely surprised. "But I've gained a great deal already! And don't forget, Mrs. Carmack and Pederson should be here soon."

"*That's* a prospect I look forward to," Mandleco tried to salvage a modicum of humor and failed miserably. He extracted a cigar, clamped his teeth upon it, frowned and glanced at his watch. He strode over and peered out at the operations room.

Beardsley said innocuously, "I wouldn't count on ECAIAC just yet."

It was Beardsley's first error. He realized it instantly. The remark seemed to trigger something in Mandleco.

The Minister of Justice turned slowly, rolling the cigar from one corner of his mouth to the other. "But I may," he said. "You know, I just may! It's barely possible, Beardsley, that with some luck we'll be able to dispense with your talents!" He said it with considerable more relish than conviction, and moved for the door. "I think I'll just see how Arnold is making out!"

Arnold was making out very well, much to Mandleco's delight. No longer was there chaos and confusion. The new feed-back unit had arrived, and installation was well under way. Blueprints were spread out as a crew of techs worked feverishly at all damage areas.

"It looks promising," Arnold hurried up to greet him. "Told you I had a good crew here! Look—see this?" He indicated one of the variant-tapes being slowly reversed across the relays.

"What is it?"

"The number eight reject."

"That what caused the trouble?"

"Well . . . we think so, but

it's problematical. Whether it did or not, we're safe in resuming the run without any shift in the correlation total."

Mandleco stared at the number eight. "Throw it out!" he snapped.

"What—what did you say, sir?"

"I said throw it out! Get this thing to functioning!"

Arnold was aghast. "But," he gulped, "we just can't throw out data! Sure, it was about to be a reject—but everything, even rejects, contain a factor-balance! You know that, sir."

Mandleco got control of himself with an effort. "Yes—yes, of course. I know you're right. But damn it, man, those units cost something like eighty thousand dollars! Suppose the same breakdown occurs?"

"Not a chance of it this time. We'll merely continue with a stepped-up synaptic check. Take longer for Cumulative, perhaps, but absolutely fool-proof once we—"

For a long instant Mandleco stood musing. Then he nodded brusquely. "All right. How long to get going?"

"Why, we'll be ready in forty minutes at the most. I told you I had a good crew, sir! Excuse me—" One of Ar-

nold's techs was motioning to him. "Excuse me," Arnold said again, and hurried away to consult with the man.

"Forty minutes!" Mandleco couldn't believe it. He chor-tled happily, and swung about to greet Beardsley who approached at that moment. "Hear that, Beardsley? Forty minutes! Excellent man, Arnold. I'm sorry I ever doubted—"

Beardsley wasn't listening. He stared about at the miracle of reconstruction, and there was more of amazement on his face than distress. Adjusting his glasses, he gazed thoughtfully at Jeff Arnold's retreating figure.

Mandleco was saying, "Just as well your little experiment didn't go any further! Dangerous precedent . . . don't know what possessed me . . . you realize that in the last analysis I'll have to put my faith in ECAIAC! No bad feelings?"

"No, sir," Beardsley pronounced somberly. "No bad feelings, because I'm holding you to your word. ECAIAC hasn't solved your case and it never will."

Mandleco stood still, open-mouthed. "What's that? Nonsense! Arnold just assured me—"

"He assured you of noth-

ing! I'm more convinced than ever now. I'm the only one who can solve this case, and I'm holding you to your word."

Mandleco seemed undecided whether to laugh or censure. His heavy fingers opened and closed aimlessly, as he stared across the room at Arnold and back at Beardsley. Finally his teeth snapped together. "Beardsley," he choked—"I warn you, if this is some sort of trickery—"

Beardsley shook his head solemnly. "You'd do well to believe me, sir. I was never more serious."

"So you're determined to go on with it! Very well, Beardsley. You have something like forty minutes, and believe me you'd better prove yourself! May I remind you"—fraught with meaning, his voice bordered on anticipation—"may I remind you, Beardsley, that already you've given sufficient cause for a complete review of your qualifications as Coördinator?"

Beardsley looked at him and smiled. "Yes, sir. And may I remind *you*, sir," he nodded toward the far door, "that your guests have arrived?"

Mrs. Carmack, Beardsley thought as he watched her, was that rare type of woman

who could defy all the current conventions of style and carry it off successfully; her type of beauty was unostentatious and yet vibrant. She was dressed impeccably in black and silver, her hair was authentic honey-blonde in a coronet braid, and her face possessed that pure line of profile together with the quality of translucence one sees in rare porcelain . . . Sheila Carmack was thirty-five, and she paid her beauticians that many thousands annually to keep her looking fifteen years younger. Just now she seemed in buoyant good spirits as she greeted Mandleco.

Not so the young man who accompanied her. The escort was a person Beardsley had never seen before, quite handsome and quite aware of it, with an impudent world-wisdom centered about his sharp eyes. He turned immediately to Mandleco with a bluster as phony as it was towering:

"This is an outrage, sir! A damned outrage! On Sheila's behalf I deplore these tactics, and I question your right! Our entire afternoon perfectly ruined . . ."

"Correction, darling," purred Mrs. Carmack. "You mean our perfect afternoon entirely ruined." She turned smiling to the Minister of

Justice. "You really mustn't mind Victor."

"Hello, Sheila," Mandleco greeted her wanly. "I must apologize for the inconvenience, but I assure you—"

"Oh, but this is thrilling! I mean really!" Mrs. Carmack was gazing about ECAIAC's room with considerable more delight than suspicion, and Beardsley watching her was thinking: *Thrilling! Can she really mean it? She must surely be aware of ECAIAC's task for today—today of all days . . .*

He glanced uneasily down the room, and saw that Jeff Arnold was much too occupied to have noticed the newcomers. He gestured to Mandleco, who finally took the hint and escorted the visitors into the privacy of the office.

There Mandleco offered drinks, but the young man named Victor refused his, preferring to maintain his air of injured dignity. Mandleco sighed and gave an accusing look at Beardsley. "I know this is unusual," he apologized to Sheila, "but I—uh—I am rather hopeful that you may find it entertaining!" He gave a slight sardonic emphasis to the last word. "If you'll just bear with me until our other guest arrives."

Victor had been awaiting his chance. "Another? *Really!* We're guests, Sheila, do you hear that?" He looked at Mandleco with immense disdain, gave a pert tilt of his head and surveyed the room with a grimace of distaste. "And just how long are we to be detained in this—this—"

Beardsley's fist itched to splatter those handsome features around a little. Instead he strode forward, said bluntly: "That'll do it, sonny! Who the hell are you anyway?"

The handsome face sneered at him. "I am Victor d'Arlan! I am a good friend of Sheila's—of the family," he corrected. "We were on our way to the Concert when those — those *impertinent* men detained us. To think we must forego Perro's Fifth Color-Concerto for Sub-Chromatics in favor of *this!*"

Sheila's eyes danced with tolerant amusement. "Victor, please. This promises to be much more exciting; I'm sure Mr. Mandleco knows what he is about, and . . ." Wide and curious, her gaze went to Beardsley and lingered there.

Belatedly, Mandleco made introductions. "Perhaps I should explain," he gave an improvident laugh, "that Mr. Beardsley's role at the moment is—ah—a little beyond

the ordinary! That is, I—" He paused miserably, and then was saved for the moment as all eyes turned toward the door.

Brook Pederson had arrived and the attention of everyone was drawn to him.

The effect was startling. The tele-columnist was a tall, dour and bushy-browed man who took a perverse sort of pride in the impression he gave of shabbiness. He slouched wordlessly into the room, hands thrust deep in the pockets of a makeshift jacket. But there was nothing shabby about the man's perceptive and analytic mind, Beardsley remembered; true, Pederson had fallen from the heights since the ECAIAC debacle, but his retirement from the limelight was more studied than sullen and could only have been his own choosing. Lately he had emerged again, and with all of his old news-sense and political acumen he was making his presence felt . . . he was a man of considered—but lightning mood who, when asked for an opinion invariably gave an argument.

Beardsley observed him shrewdly. From the depths of his mind came a warning, a restless unease that took root and blossomed into turbu-

lence. *This man will bear special watching . . .*

Pederson came on into the room, nodded dourly at Mandleco (no love lost there!) and remained alertly silent; for the merest instant he met Beardsley's gaze, and there was a definite challenge and something of mockery. *Damn him, thought Beardsley, he knows why he's here . . . but how could he know? He's aware that he's on the tapes, too—even one of the Primes—and he doesn't give a damn!*

Mandleco finished the introductions quickly and took over. It was plain that he wanted to get through with this, but at the same time Beardsley sensed that he was no longer quite so sure of Jeff Arnold and ECAIAC . . . above all things, Mandleco had to avoid any hint of trouble with ECAIAC.

And he managed that with an adroitness that bordered on the cunning. After some glowing comments on Beardsley's past esteemed record—with pointed emphasis on the pre-ECAIAC era—he ended with a truly inspirational touch:

"Let us just say, then, that you have been invited here in the interests of an experiment which Crime-Central has been contemplating

for some time. An inquiry into—ah—certain facets of past investigatory methods. Crude as it may seem to you, certain factors may be forthcoming here—psychologic and derivational—which may later be refined, analyzed and integrated into the operational function of ECAIAC . . .”

Beardsley stared at Mandeco. It was altogether a neat side-step, and he almost admired him for it.

“Please understand, this is a necessary adjunct to the true development of ECAIAC. We shall have here two divergent lines of approach within parallel fields. Actually, each of you will be an important co-aide in this experiment! I would like you to cooperate fully with Mr. Beardsley’s line of approach. Uh—vintage ’60,” he added for their amusement.

The reaction was immediate and varied. Victor d’Arlan examined his fingernails and registered aristocratic boredom. Pederson slouched up against the desk, seeming amused at Mandeco’s pitch . . . but he wasn’t watching Mandeco. The gaze he fastened on Beardsley said plainer than words that he was quite aware of the situation.

Only Sheila Carmack seemed fascinated, as she sat a bit

straighter in her chair and peered brightly across her drink. It was obvious that she, for one, was taken in.

“Why, I wouldn’t have missed it for the world!” she sparkled. “Just like, you know, in those—what did they call them—*whodunits*? It’s actually thrilling!”

“It’s archaic!” d’Arlan sneered.

“It’s heroic,” said Pederson, his gaze still on the little Co-ordinator. “Beardsley, I hope you pull it off. I actually do. Always did think you were twice the man ECAIAC is!”

Beardsley moved forward, not smiling. “Thanks,” he said. “In that case you won’t mind if I begin with you.”

“With *me*?” Pederson stared, then laughed suddenly and without mirth. “Skip it, Beardsley! I know your methods, and I can tell you right now it won’t get you any—”

Beardsley stopped him. “Pederson,” he said, “as of now we agree on just one thing. I also think I’m twice the man. The only difference is that I’m man enough to *really* believe it.” He paused and watched him absorb that. “It’s going to be ECAIAC or vintage ’60, Pederson. Your choice!”

It was at once a rebuff and

a challenge. Pederson then straightened up slowly, a muscle in his face flinched and then he smiled—with all but his eyes. “All right,” he snapped, “we’ll begin with me. I’ll fill you in plenty! You want to know if I saw Carmack the day of the murder? I did! The louse put through a vis call to me. *Insisted* I come out and see him—”

“Whoa, now just a minute! You wouldn’t say this was a friendly visit?”

“I’ll get to that!” Pederson’s words came fast and clipped. “You know how I fought the ECAIAC lobby. I fought it long and hard, and when I lost it finished me with the public. But I wasn’t through! I began digging up every fact I could about Carmack. Took me a few years, but worth it. Most of it smelled! Ask Professor Losch, he’ll tell you—”

“I’ve already spoken with Losch,” Beardsley said quietly. “He managed to convey his sentiments pretty thoroughly.”

“Good. Then try talking to *him*,” Pederson nodded venomously at Mandleco. “Ask *Mandleco* how the great Carmack managed to get those patents through . . . I can tell you he didn’t do it alone! Oh, I’ve dug plenty!”

“Why, you—” Mandleco gave a snort of anger and started forward, but Beardsley managed to forestall him. He gazed sternly at the telecolumnist.

“I think we’re all aware of your considerable talent for digging, Pederson. ECAIAC, too,” he added pointedly, “for we already have it on the tapes.”

Pederson bristled. “Sure. Sure, you have it! My past connection, my opposition to the lobby, even my digging maybe. But you don’t have it all! How do you equate *hate*, Beardsley? Is *that* on your tapes?”

Beardsley could have told him that it was, indeed, on the tapes. But he only shook his head. “No,” he said slowly, “we don’t have it all. Not ECAIAC nor I nor any of us, and that’s the eternal pity of it. But I’d like to try! The sum and the substance, Pederson . . . don’t you understand me? Just once before I’m through—”

It was the voice, some secret and subtle thing in the voice that reached out and gripped Pederson and bore meaning with it. He stood quite motionless, staring at Beardsley; for a split second his eyes widened, then disbe-

lief gave way to something of comprehension, admiration.

"Beardsley," he said softly. "You fool. You utter damned fool!"

Oblivious of the others, then, he turned and began to pace. "All right. Here it is. Carmack called me out to see him. He had gotten wind of what I was up to, and offered to buy me off." Pederson laughed bitterly. "Wasn't even subtle about it! Said he liked my stuff, and would like to see me at the top again where I belonged. Said he could arrange for me to step into a top job at Central Telecast. Providing, of course, I could manage to—ah—'forget' certain little items I'd uncovered."

Pederson was doing all right. Beardsley gave him his lead.

"He actually thought it would be that simple! I refused him outright, and of course, he couldn't believe it. A man like that— We dropped all pretense, there were some bitter words—"

Beardsley said quickly, "Could you elaborate?"

"Oh, I don't remember exactly. He went venomous! I suppose there were threats. I told him he hadn't enough money or influence to buy what I knew, and that when

I had it properly documented I intended to make a national scandal of it." Pederson halted abruptly. "You know, it occurred to me later that was a foolhardy thing to say!"

"Ah? Why is that?"

"Well, I had heard of that safeguard of his—the 'neurovibe'—and I suppose there were other things, too. He was a cautious man, a dangerous man. But," Pederson shrugged, "he let me into his home readily enough."

Beardsley lifted a finger. "Because he was confident he was going to buy you—wouldn't you say?"

"I suppose that's it. Maybe I was lucky to get out of there so easily! Anyway I did." Pederson stopped pacing, and his gaze bored into Beardsley's. "So now to the big question. Yes, he was alive when I left him. No, I never saw Carmack again. I went straight to my office and worked until well past midnight; by the way, I have ample proof of that—"

"Yes, I'm sure you do! What were your feelings at this point?"

"My feelings? I knew my life was in danger now! Carmack would be out to stop me. I don't mind admitting I was ... well, rather relieved, when I heard the news."

"Ah-h! And when did you hear it?"

Pederson glared, but his answer was quick. "Late the next afternoon, of course! By habit I work late hours and I sleep long." With an air of finality he threw a challenging look around. "I want to congratulate whoever did it, and I don't much care whether the answer comes from you or ECAIAC!"

Beardsley surveyed him solemnly. Pederson had little more than brushed the surface, but it was enough, it served to set the pattern; he could have sworn Pederson was aware of that. He said drily, "Thanks, Pederson. Your story is—very pat."

He turned to the others. Mandleco rather surprised him, seeming not so much disturbed as he was engrossed deep in thought; as for Mrs. Carmack, Beardsley saw that the comedy had gone out of it for her, but she tried to keep up the veneer.

"This is all most interesting!" she sparkled, placing her glass down carefully and turning to face him. "Am I to be next, Mr. Beardsley? Shall I give both the questions and the answers as Mr. Pederson did?"

"No, Mrs. Carmack. I'll do

that! I took note a moment ago that you mentioned the *whodunits*. You must be familiar with them? Say as a hobby?"

It wasn't at all what she expected. She stood wide-eyed and startled.

"This is so thrilling, remember. Vintage '60! As the *whodunits* will tell you, one of the prime requisites is an accounting and proof of your whereabouts at the time of the deed! Well?"

Beardsley's voice was just edged enough to throw her into confusion. "Why, I—" she faltered. "You mean that night? I—I—"

"What, no alibi? You don't even remember? According to vintage '60 that could mean either complete innocence or extreme cunning; beware the suspect who is clever enough to be ready with no alibi!"

Beardsley saw her stiffen; there was a change across her face, a struggle beneath the eyes. "But then," he shrugged, "it has always been my conviction that *motive* rather than opportunity is the real requisite. On that basis it's plain you couldn't have killed your husband. You loved him! He was only fifty-eight, he only left you a dozen million dollars, but you loved him and you were faithful! Anyone

can see that after seven weeks you're still all broken up over it!"

The veneer was gone now; Sheila Carmack's eyes were vicious pools of hate, her mouth a grimace. "Why, you—you ridiculous little monster!" Victor d'Arlan stepped forward belligerently. "Say, now look here! This is all very—" Beardsley placed a hand on d'Arlan's chest and shoved, and the latter stumbled back with mouth agape. Pederson was gazing at Beardsley with delight and admiration, seeming to visualize this little man as material for his next tele-column. Mandeleco stood transfixed, a monument of agony, twisting a fist into his palm. "Beardsley, stop it! This ridiculous farce has gone far enough! I warned you about these tactics—"

Beardsley said, "Shut up!" and Mandeleco stood there with mouth opening and closing soundlessly.

"Well, Mrs. Carmack? Answer me! You loved your husband, didn't you? For the past ten minutes you've heard him maligned; I should think you'd want to protect his very good name!"

"Sheila, I must advise you against making *any* statement of whatever nature!" Mandeleco strode for the tele-stat,

then turned back and pointed a trembling finger at Beardsley. "This man," he choked—"this man is no longer acting in any official capacity for Crime-Central!"

With a quick step Pederson got himself between Mandeleco and the tele-stat; he strolled over to the instrument and leaned against it, with a knowing look at Beardsley.

Sheila Carmack tilted her chin in defiance. "But I *wish* to answer this man. I insist on answering! Loved Amos Carmack? Love him?" Her voice rose a full octave and broke in stridence. "For the past nine years I have *hated*—his—guts!"

For a long moment the room was silent. No one moved. Beardsley's thick glasses glinted eerily as he peered around at them, from Mandeleco to Sheila to Pederson and back to Mandeleco.

"Well now," he said, "this is remarkable. Most remarkable! Everyone hated Carmack. Professor Losch—we know why. Pederson here—he's told us why. His wife—I think it's obvious. Who else? Surely not you, Mandeleco! Carmack was a pal of yours! You backed his cause with ECAIAC, you lobbied for him, you even stole patents for him

... I wonder what persuasion he held over you to bring all that about. Or is *persuasion* too mild a word? Vintage '60 had a better term for it!"

Slowly, through the murk of his agitation Mandleco seized a measure of control; he gazed at Beardsley out of cold incalculable eyes now hooded with dire intention. "You're really trying hard, aren't you!" he grated. "Well, make the most of it, because I guarantee *you* won't be around, not after the next Annual Basic! Do you understand that—*Mister Coördinator?*"

But Beardsley was watching Pederson now, whose face took on a sudden febrile gleam. "Blackmail . . . by God, Beardsley, *that's* it! And I have the proof! Sure, it was Carmack I was after, but I dug out a lot more—" Pederson shot a challenging look at the Minister of Justice. "It goes back some years, but I can prove that Amos Carmack had enough on Mandleco to *finish him politically any time he chose*. You can bet your life Mandleco hated him. Enough to warrant murder!"

There was an odd, illogical delight in the way Pederson said it—and something almost frightening the way Mandleco just stood there in cold si-

lence, gazing at the tele-columnist with a look of boundless regret.

Beardsley said very softly, "Thanks, Pederson, but I'd suggest you save it. It's scarcely pertinent now."

"Not pertinent? But, man, I tell you I have proof! What better motive would you—"

"Motive?" Beardsley hit him with a pitying glance. "Why, I thought it was obvious. We've progressed beyond *motives* now."

Again there was an electric silence, and Beardsley let it assimilate. "I have said," he went on, "that all this is most remarkable. But you know, the *really* remarkable thing—" He paused and watched them. Mandleco continued to grind a fist into his palm; Pederson straightened attentively, and d'Arlan, sneery no longer, moved over to stand beside Sheila Carmack.

"—the really remarkable thing is this. I am now ready to state, unequivocally, that the person who killed Amos Carmack . . . *didn't hate him at all.*"

A thought was throbbing through the room like the seconds passing. Quick and cumulative, almost embodied, it made transition from stunned

mind to startled mind as Beardsley stood there blinking at them. Beardsley really didn't mind; they just couldn't know how subtly he worked into his themes! Taking advantage of the lull, he went over to the door and peered out into the Operations Room.

He peered long and soberly, then turned. Mandleco had found his voice first, perplexity pushing down his anger: "Beardsley, either you're bereft of your senses or— Do you mean to say," he choked—"after going to these preposterous lengths do you mean to say that no one *here*—"

"Just a moment!" To everyone's surprise it was d'Arlan who broke in. "I'm not sure what's going on here, not sure at all, but I want to make one thing quite clear. *Sheila* had no complicity in this crime! I know, because—" He hesitated, touched her gently on the arm. "Sorry, darling, I've got to say it. I know because she was with *me* that night."

Sheila was startled for a moment, then utterly scathing. "You needn't lie for me, Victor! I appreciate your sense of the dramatic, and even your motives, but I assure you they are both misplaced. I have never heard such nonsense!"

d'Arlan looked more deso-

late than abashed. As for Beardsley, he was only a little amused. "Well, now, this is really more than I deserve; in all my years on Homicide I wanted to experience this, but I finally put it down as a myth. The Noble Alibi!" He peered sharply. "True vintage, right out of the *whodunits*—wouldn't you agree, Mrs. Carmack?"

The answer didn't come, and Beardsley went on sternly: "And you reject his noble attempt on your behalf. That is interesting! Especially, as it occurs to me that d'Arlan's effort is just a little delayed . . ." He paused, gazing thoughtfully upward. "It's enough to make one wonder whether his noble effort is designed to protect you—or himself!"

d'Arlan suddenly paled, as if he had just been kicked in the stomach. He gulped heavily and tried to speak. Beardsley watched stolidly for a moment, then dismissed him with a gesture of complete disgust. "Oh, hell, never mind! I would say neither. The lady is right, sonny, you'd better watch those impulses. You just aren't the type!"

Mandleco had been hanging onto every word, grimly intent; he was sure Beardsley

was getting somewhere at last. Now he straightened, and his grinding fist indicated that he'd had quite enough. Without a word, without even a deigning glance at Beardsley, he traversed the office with great purposeful strides and slammed through the outer door into ECAIAC's room—

And was back an instant later, trailing Jeff Arnold as the latter brushed past him into the office. Mandleco was saying something urgently, tugging at Arnold's arm. Arnold ignored him. His startled gaze was on the little group.

"Sheila!" He took a step forward. "Sheila, what are you doing here?"

"I wish you'd tell me, Jeff. I wish *someone* would explain what this is all about . . ."

Beardsley watched the tableau in silence. Jeff Arnold's gaze flicked to d'Arlan, who stared back with insolence, and there was no mistaking the hostility that leaped between the two.

Sheila noticed it, too, and there was an indecisive moment that mounted toward panic. Beardsley watched her churning effort to control it. She said quickly, an inflection of fear in her voice: "Mr. Beardsley, if it *really* matters—my whereabouts that night

—you'll understand my reluctance to say it before! I was with Jeff. Truly! I'm sure he will tell you—"

The words were directed at Beardsley, but she was talking to Jeff Arnold. And deliberately, almost brutally, Arnold refused to accept the cue. Beardsley saw the pleading turn to apprehension in Sheila's eyes.

"But, Jeff, you remember! Surely you do! Jeff, you don't understand—you must tell them—"

Arnold looked at her for a single comprehending instant, a pitying instant, then his lips compressed tightly as he turned away.

There was finality in it. Sheila's eyes were stark and unbelieving. She stood there without motion, without a word, her mind groping in a shock of blindness.

Beardsley said gently, "It's all right, Mrs. Carmack. It's really all right. Merely an experiment, an inquiry into comparative methods as Mandleco said. I'm truly sorry if my methods seemed harsh, but"—he shrugged—"I dare say my participation is over now."

"You're damned right you may say it, Beardsley!" Arnold's eyes raked him with venom, but he controlled him-

self and turned to Mandleco. "I only came to tell you, sir, that we have ECAIAC ready. We'll be reaching Cumulative very shortly now."

"Jeff . . . are you *sure*?"

"Quite sure! Depend on it, there'll be no more trouble."

More than relief took hold of Mandleco; it was transformation, it was as if a spell had been snapped. He glanced once about the room, and shuddered as his gaze encountered Beardsley.

"Uh—yes. Fine!" he said. "That's fine, Jeff! Shall we proceed?" He strode through the door, pausing only to fling back scathingly: "That is, if Mr. Beardsley is quite sure it meets with *his* approval!"

ECAIAC was in finest fettle again as the tapes sped through. Circuits were activated. Codes gave meaning. Synaptic cells summed and integrated, cancelled and compared and with saucy assurance sent the findings on toward Cumulative. The murmur was soft and sustained and somehow apologetic, as if ECAIAC were quite aware that she had failed in her duty but would be just pleased to make amends *this* time.

So like a woman . . . fractious, unfathomable, then fawning and attrite—with a

purpose! Beardsley cocked his head and listened, his mien almost beatific. Purpose? This creature had none that could quite match his! He was convinced of it now, and he had never been more happy or self-assured.

It was Pederson who was distressed, as he paced with long nervous strides and watched the equate - panel where the mathematics were made visible in a pattern of constantly changing lights. It had meaning only for the techs, but Pederson couldn't seem to take his eyes from it. At last he came over to Beardsley and managed to steer him aside.

"Beardsley, I just don't get it! This whole thing—are you quite sure—"

Beardsley blinked at him. "Sure of what, Pederson?"

"Of what you're doing! Damn it, man, don't tell me that was all waste effort in there! Look—I know what this means, and I'm with you all the way. If only you could beat ECAIAC, I'll give it all the publicity it can bear! Who knows—"

Beardsley looked at him blankly, and Pederson gave a snort and a gesture. "All right! I guess I'm wrong. For a while there I actually thought you had it." Pederson

surveyed him shrewdly. "Just the same, that bit you exploded—about the person who killed Carmack didn't hate him at all—you meant that, Beardsley!"

"That's right, I meant it."

"My choice is Jeff Arnold."

"Ah? Now why do you say that?"

"The way you built up to it, that's why. And you got your result! Sheila Carmack's in love with Arnold, and she tried to cover up for him . . . sure, that's it! It's obvious! She thinks he's the killer, either thinks or knows it—"

"Ah, yes. The obvious," Beardsley said with a grimace. "But you know, I learned a long time ago that the *obvious* can be a mighty tricky thing. A dangerous thing. The forceps of the mind are greedy, and inclined to crush a little in the seizing . . ."

Pederson pondered that. "And you," he said slowly, "are not seizing. I take that to mean you still have an angle!"

Beardsley didn't answer at once. He glanced over at the equate-panel, at the flux of dancing lights. Mandleco was bright-eyed and attentive, chomping on the stub of a cigar, head thrust forward as he listened to some detail of Arnold's. Sheila stood miserably near by, still in a blind

shock of disbelief; it was as if she had a need to be close to Arnold, and he felt it, too, but they dared not look at each other.

"Now let's suppose," said Beardsley, "just suppose that Arnold thinks *Sheila* is the killer. Eh? Let us say they *suspect each other*. Naturally, each has disclaimed any part of the deed. But the suspicion is there, that tiny seed; and suspicion, particularly where love is involved, has a habit of taking root and giving growth. Neither can be *totally* sure of the other's innocence—eh?" He paused, peering up at Pederson. "And Arnold would want to protect her from any possible consequence. Now what would be his way of doing that? The only way he knew?"

He saw the idea take hold. Pederson was staring at the equate-panel with an odd look of excitement.

"Total reject," he gasped. "By God, if he should try *that*—to equate her from Logical into reject—" He gestured helplessly. "No, it isn't possible. Those tapes are coded! There's no way of tampering—" Pederson stopped abruptly, as a great light dawned. "Wait a minute, though. It needn't be the tapes! One

thing I've always wondered—*would* it be possible to negate a given factor beyond all reach of empirical coördinates? You know, through operational technique or set-up—”

Beardsley peered at him. “I’d say anything was possible,” he urged, “given time and incentive.”

Pederson bobbed his head in facile agreement. “By God, you’re right! For example, I’ve always thought there wasn’t sufficient control on Cumulative! You can bet your life Arnold would know . . . results at that point *could* be juggled a little, say if the extrapolations were just—”

The forceps, the forceps of the mind. Already Pederson was reaching out to seize and to crush; the man was a fool after all! Beardsley felt a burgeoning disgust, but there was something more, a throbbing, chest-filling sensation that he strove to hold rigidly in leash. He said quickly: “Come to think of it, Arnold did mention that he was here most of last night, working on set-up.”

He watched Pederson absorb that, too; he saw the excitement grow. “Beardsley, if you are *sure*—if you could prove that Arnold managed a thing like that—”

They were interrupted by the sudden quiet that engulfed the room. It was so total as to be frightening. CUMULATIVE—CUMULATIVE — CUMULATIVE. For half-a-minute all operation ceased, as the words flashed bright across the panel.

But the techs had been waiting. It was a mere respite. Swiftly, they checked their respective units against Cumulative Code, and at the end of thirty seconds every light went green for total clearance as ECAIAC’s deep-throated power resumed.

Beardsley had been waiting too. “Cumulative!” he breathed. He let his breath out slowly, and made a sweeping gesture that seemed to encompass all the latent delight, all the unleashed joy of his being.

He was aware of Pederson again, a voice in panic: “Beardsley! Don’t you know what it means? If there’s been an imbalance, it has passed through! It will reach final equate!”

“That’s right, it’s entirely in ECAIAC’s lap. You wouldn’t want to deprive her of the chance, now would you?”

“But—but what are you going to do?”

“Me? I’m going to watch. I’m going to watch one of the

epic events of our time—" For a moment Beardsley was solemn, almost shocked, as a thought struck him. "In a way it will be sad. Yes, it will! ECAIAC is about to lose her first case."

Now that was strange. Why should he have said such a thing? *Why . . . now that the game was over which had had to be played, and he felt the bitter-sweet surge of victory that lay throbbing at his grasp!* About to lose her first case . . .

He shrugged in remote annoyance and strode away from Pederson. It would be fast now! Already the rejects were falling, the irrelevant, as ECAIAC with blithe unconcern brought the final equate toward conclusion. He observed Jeff Arnold, standing silent and alert but so devoid of all emotion that somehow it wasn't real . . . and Mandleco, half crouched, teeth gnawing away at the cigar, his heavy face rapacious and eager as he awaited the final tape; that was all that mattered now; the MATHEMATICS would register, CODE would add synaptic approval, and proof indisputable would be on that tape in clean translated print—the name of Carmack's killer.

Indisputable? Bowing his

head, Beardsley smiled, and listened to the smooth rhythmic control. Nothing sinister now! No snapping malevolence! All those other times . . . his unreasoning panic, the askance remarks from Arnold, the humiliation . . . the very thought of it now was gibing and obscene. How could he ever have been caught up in such a thrall of terror?

It wasn't terror he felt now. Something . . . His smile turned to a giggle as he felt a sudden compelling impulse to pat ECAIAC on the head!

Now how would one do THAT? Never mind. Never mind, never mind, never again are you going to snap at me, Ekky. We were introduced, remember? We're really great friends now.

For a moment Beardsley was suspended in astonishment, aware that he had almost crooned the thought. He glanced around in embarrassment—

Pederson was watching him. Pederson was at his side again, perplexed and frowning. "Beardsley—this business of Sheila and Arnold. It wouldn't happen that way, it couldn't! There's another answer, there's got to be—"

Beardsley stood unmoving,

oblivious. Almost, he seemed suspended in another dimension; almost, he caught the quivering of a mind but could not separate it from the sudden tremor that rose in his own...

He couldn't avoid it. It came unbidden, it battered through his reason, it towered there and blotted out his thoughts until all that was left was a tremulous regret, an attrite compassion.

About to lose her first case . . . *but one loses! And one survives it, you know, one survives it! For twelve years now . . .*

More than a tremor now. More than compassion now. A sense of betrayal almost, illogical and nameless and yet palpable as the scent of fear. There was a pulse of red darkness in Beardsley's brain as all the mental and emotional equations of his being sang a sharp alarm. For subtly, ever so subtly ECAIAC's deep-throated tone had changed . . . nothing like those other times, rather it was a halting stutter of puzzlement, erratic and querulous, with overtones of immediacy as if some formless presence were on the verge of unleashing.

Beardsley looked down at his hands, and they were

trembling. He could not stop the trembling. A tightness took him about the heart, and behind his eyes that pulse of red darkness presaged the beginning of a violent headache.

Even the others noticed it now, something amiss. Jeff Arnold especially. He looked up in quick alarm at the equate-panel where the mathematics seemed to have gone a little fitful, a little frantic, with stuttery lapses in progression as if ECAIAC were unable or unwilling to confront.

The flux of pattern dimmed, then hesitated; blanked out and heroically began anew.

It happened suddenly, then. It happened as the techs came crowding around. There came a quivering, a sort of shudder, and ECAIAC subsided with a final weary gasp. It was for all the world as if she were saying, "This is it, boys. I've had it!"

But it was there, it was there! All at once every symbol was constant, static and livid upon the screen, enhanced by the words EQUATE—COMPLETE—EQUATE—COMPLETE. In that moment every tech in the room must have felt a touch of pride.

A click, a whirr, and it was done. The fateful tape ejected.

Both Mandleco and Arnold

leaped for it, but Arnold was there first. He ripped the tape clear and then paused, hand outflung, as if he could not resist this final bit of drama.

"Well? Well, Arnold?" Mandleco was hopping ludicrously about in an agony of impatience.

Arnold nodded. He brought the tape to his scrutiny. His mouth opened, then shut again as a shudder seized him. Once more he read it, a look of wild disbelief on his face . . . he staggered, and seemed about to cry or go hysterical or both.

Mandleco gave a snort as he pounced, recovered the tape and with blunt assurance read the words aloud:

"SOLUTION : UNTENABLE : SOLUTION : UNTENABLE : SUB-CIRCUIT REFERRAL : ELLERY SHERLOCK : SUB-CIRCUIT REFERRAL : ELLERY SHERLOCK—"

He sounded like a well-grooved parrot. Mandleco turned east, then south, then south-by-east, like a compass on a binge; he looked as if he wanted to roar, but his voice came out as a frantic bleat: "Why, this is crazy! Goddam it, it's crazy! Do you realize what this will—" He confronted Arnold wildly. "What the hell does it MEAN, I say! Untenable? And who the hell is *Ellery Sherlock* . . . !"

He got no response; Jeff Arnold was oblivious to the moment, a man utterly defeated, beyond solace or action or answer . . . but already a few of his techs were huddled about the panel, consulting, viewing the Equate Constant and frantically taking notes. Mandleco shoved his way through them. "I demand to know the meaning of this!" he yelled.

It was Sheila Carmack who answered, her voice on the high edge of hysteria. "*Meaning?* I think it might mean," she said, "that ECAIAC has also had a recent indulgence for the *whodunits*. But with a smattering of confusion, wouldn't you say? Or would you say a distortion of the detectival? Perhaps a disenchantment," she murmured . . . this was too absurd, too delicious. "Ellery Sherlock!" she choked, and the thought of it seemed to break her up.

In the general hysteria they paid no heed to Raoul Beardsley. He had regained his composure, and far down in his eyes something leaped into rapt expression; he adjusted his glasses and peered around cautiously, beaming. He beamed at them all, and had to suppress an inane glee . . .

Not glee as he observed

Pederson, who stood there scowling into space as though at some incredible absurdity. Suddenly Pederson straightened, and there was something strangely different . . . his gaze as it met Beardsley's was neither shocked nor accusing but held an expression of boundless sadness.

So Pederson knew. At last the poor fellow had found that other answer . . . Beardsley had been expecting it. He could almost sense the man's thoughts going to and fro, like a shuttle, weaving all the facts into fabric . . .

And Pederson's voice, inevitably sad now, regretful now: "So I was right the first time. The tapes. It *was* the tapes. But even without that I ought to have known! The answer was there, you handed it to us, but it was like looking straight into the sun—"

He paused. Did he expect Beardsley to say something? Beardsley looked up at him and blinked.

"*Motives,*" Pederson said accusingly. "There was your theme from the first! You were relentless, you pursued it to perfection, you laid our motives bare and you beat them raw, each and every one. Oh, I grant you it was masterful! It was the Beardsley of

old! You managed to keep us off balance every moment—" He wet his lips. "What was it, Beardsley? A compulsion, some grotesque need to squeeze us all down to microscopic size first? Oh, you enjoyed doing that! I watched you. You enjoyed it in a way that—" He shook his head, glanced sorrowfully at the equate-panel. "And this . . . was it all for this? An achievement—an absurdity. Ellery Sherlock!" he said with a shudder. "In Heaven's name, WHY? You didn't really expect to carry it off? No, don't answer! It's not important now—"

Beardsley shrugged in remote annoyance. Must the man use such puerile methods?

"Not important," Pederson repeated, and stood caught in a startled wonderment. "Because you see, Beardsley, I just happen to remember something from the *whodunits*! That surprises you? So long ago, I can't quite recall who said it; but it was a rather good exposition of logic, something to the effect that when you've exhausted the possible, all the possible—that which remains—*no matter how impossible it may seem—must be the truth!*"

His head lifted; his gaze

bored into Beardsley's and his voice was tight with meaning. "And I'd say we have come full circle, wouldn't you? You will have to admit, you did a *real good job of eliminating!*"

Beardsley managed to smile, even as his mind jarred a little. Even as he met Pederson's gaze and saw the compassion there, the acceptance there, the understanding and boundless regret. For a split second something leaped unspoken between them, as if doors in both their minds had opened and closed again.

He turned away wordlessly. Close as Pederson had come, even he was an irrelevance now. *But ECAIAC didn't* know. Poor Ekky! Her first real failure, a fiasco—she really deserved a better fate. Beardsley's heart went out to her, as he observed Arnold in his defeat and Mandleco in his frustration and the huddle of techs in their futile efforts.

Suddenly then—"Code!" he heard one of them say, gesturing excitedly. "Post-subjective synapse!" another tech yelled, and there was a sudden scurry of activity about the screen. Without warning or appreciable reason those symbols had begun to shift . . . wild and elusive, ghost patterns without semblance or sense, but so unmistakable

that even Jeff Arnold was jarred alert; Arnold stared, then suddenly was white as chalk as he ploughed into the midst of his techs.

Beardsley stood frozen, a fatuous smile about his lips; there was only silence now, a silence that had a pulse in it—the beating of his heart. Seconds only . . . suddenly there was another pulse, from another heart. ECAIAC wasn't quite finished! Unerring and resolute the sound came up, slowly at first and then faster, gathering strength into a steady drone as if every synapse were dredging, dredging deep into the sensitized structure . . . and even before the panel attained flux again, a tech was waving his notes and yelling, "It's true! Post-subjective synapse! Unbelievable . . . Jeff, we now have a Constant!"

But ECAIAC was telling them that. The sound went on, and on, wild and lone and constant, ascending to the confines of the room, transcending the confines of reason. It was crescendo incarnate; it was purpose gone rife; it was human and more than human, with all the fears and hopes and hates, as it attained a high-pitched scream with wailing overtones such as even Arnold had never heard. There

was sentience in it, there was awareness in it, there was fury in it and who could say if there was grief . . . ? There might have been.

Only Beardsley knew. He felt suddenly packed in ice, from his lips to the pit of his belly; he revolved slowly away, took a few steps and caught the edge of the panel. His whole body began to shake uncontrollably and his lips moved in a soundless whisper that seemed to say, "No, no . . . don't you understand? . . . we're friends now!"

But no one heard; no one would have understood. Arnold handled the tape as it came looping out. The words fell slowly at first, then faster and faster in constant repeat: CANCEL LAST EQUATE—SOLUTION TENABLE—CANCEL LAST EQUATE — SOLUTION TENABLE—

Another word came, a single word. Arnold stiffened. One of the techs was so indiscreet as to exclaim: "*Murderer*? Where did it pick up that word! 'Final Equate' is proper . . ."

A space, a whirr, and the rest of it came in a clicking rush against the high-pitched scream: MURDERER — RAOUL BEARDSLEY — MURDERER — RAOUL BEARDSLEY—MURDERER

—RAOUL — MURDERER — MURDERER—incessant, untiring.

There was no trial. Trial presupposes a modicum of doubt, and Beardsley dispelled that readily enough. Once more the pathetic figure, it was as if he were impelled by a dull and pitiless logic; he waived all defense; his confession to the murder of Amos Carmack was straightforward and factual, unvarying to the point of boredom, insistent with repetition—and in the socio-legal aspect there was the rub! Whether it was true psychic shock or mere cunning, there seemed to be a blind spot in Beardsley's responses, a stumbling reticence to elaborative detail that left the Citizen's Disposition Council with a problem on its hands baffling as it was unprecedented. Judicially they were safe. There would not even be need of null-censor. But actually, the problem here was of far more vital consequence than murder and indeed more frightening; it had to do with Beardsley *vs.* ECA-IAC, the encompassing *modus operendi* and all the implications of that grotesque de nouement.

At whatever cost, *these things had to be answered.*

Oh, there was amusement,

too. The fact that Minister-of-Justice Mandleco had begged off, far from gracefully, and retired to the isolation of his ten - thousand - acre Alaskan ranch (for an unspecified time) had brought snickers from those in the know.

The Chief-Counselor of Disposition looked as if he'd like to retire, too. For the third time in as many days he took his place in the Private Sessions chamber, glanced at Beardsley with shuddering disbelief and then bent his head in pontifical guise as he leafed through his notes; it wasn't as if he were unversed in the matter by now, but who was there to question if his lips moved fretfully across the words "Ellery Sherlock?" He was thinking: *yesterday wasted—covert regression, myself included—no more of that!* And with that bolstering thought he brought his head up sharply.

COUNSELOR: Our task for today—*(voice quavering, he saved it from the upper registers)*. Our task for today is to get at the aggregate pattern. And I assure you, gentlemen, we are going to do that! Now. Mr. Pederson, if you please . . .

PEDERSON: Yes, sir?

COUNSELOR: I see that Mr. Beardsley made certain

statements to you, and to you alone, immediately after the—uh—ECAIAC incident—

PEDERSON: You saw that three days ago! Must we go through it again?

COUNSELOR: We must and we shall! Due to the unnatural tenor of the case, it is the opinion of the Council that these things must be fixed and adjudged if we are to make a correct Disposition.

PEDERSON: *(wearily)*: Yes, sir. Well, the fact is he seemed to want to confide in me. Nothing strange in that! He realized he had lost, poor guy, and he—

COUNSELOR: Mr. Pederson! No diversions, please. We'd simply like to hear from your own lips what Beardsley told you. *(Glances at his notes.)* Is it true that he said—his sole motive in this affair was to prove he could conduct an investigation as efficiently as ECAIAC—or *any damned machine?*

PEDERSON: *(hesitant, with a glance at Beardsley who sat remote and vacuous)*: Yes. He told me that.

COUNSELOR: Even to the point of committing a murder to prove it? And his entire subsequent action was predicated upon that? We have extensive reports here—from Mrs. Carmack, from Mandle-

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co, from Jeff Arnold and yourself. It is difficult to see how such a basically integrated and well-functioning personality as Raoul Beardsley—

PEDERSON: (*angrily*): No. What you fail to see is the facade! What man has stronger reason than the man who has lost his reason? It is the only outlet for aggression, a devious fulfillment, it brings psychological satisfactions which cannot be obtained in any other way—call it the self-destructive impulse if you will. I doubt if Beardsley rationalized this—but he had come to his moment, his time of assertion, his way of making fools of us all . . . and my complete opinion, sir, is that his actions from beginning to end were both a triumph and an inspiration!

COUNSELOR: (*smugly*): Thank you, Mr. Pederson. These are the insights you had not revealed before. (*Turns to member at far end of table.*) Dr. Deobler. As psychologist assigned to Disposition Council, may I ask if there is an area of concurrence?

DEOBLER (*bored, but deigns to lift a hand*): Save for the rhetorics at the very end, you have my official concurrence; it is obvious in every aspect; this was a devi-

ous fulfillment of the self-destructive impulse.

COUNSELOR: Thank you, sir! It will be so noted. And now—(*Makes a pretense of scanning his brief.*) Now we come to an area of vital interest—an area demanding our most urgent attention, inasmuch as it gives indication of threatening our basic fundamental of cybernetic detection; believe me, I cannot place enough emphasis here; I refer, of course, to Mr. Beardsley's process of manipulation of ECAIAC, and this strange business of "Ellery Sherlock." (*Pause.*) Mr. Jeff Arnold, if you please. I believe you were to be ready with some observations today?

ARNOLD: Yes, sir. But more than observation, I am glad to report. We have *solved* the "Ellery Sherlock" equate.

COUNSELOR: This is wonderful! Will you proceed, sir?

ARNOLD: A strange thing . . . and yet so simple! We began by resurrecting a huge number of "Summaries"; we dredged into Dead File for at least three years back, re-ran them under a synapse intensifier. It's all there, you know, every minute particle of every case that has gone through ECAIAC; almost subliminal, some of it, but—

COUNSELOR: One moment, sir. This reference to "synapse." Could you—ah—clarify?

ARNOLD: Why, a synapse is the primary adjunct to memory! The human brain has billions of them, neuronically linked—sort of pathways that get grooved deeper and deeper with constant repetition of thought, until after a while they become completely permanent, retentive and self-functioning. ECAIAC is similarly equipped—not to the degree of the human brain, as yet, but amazingly.

COUNSELOR (*dazed*): Ah—yes. Please continue, sir.

ARNOLD: As I said, we received a number of the old cases. And what we discovered, was that Beardsley—for years past, mind you—had been utilizing his capacity as Chief of Coördinates to introduce extraneous material to ECAIAC *via* the tapes! In each and every case that came before him! Oh, you can believe me, he was clever, he went about it by slow and subtle degrees! And the substance of this material, sir—(*Pauses, gulps and shakes his head, unable to go on.*)

COUNSELOR: Please control yourself, sir! The substance of this extraneous material?

ARNOLD (*again gulps*): Detective fiction!

COUNSELOR (*leans forward sharply*): Do I understand you correctly, Mr. Arnold? You did say *detective fiction*?

ARNOLD: Of two types. Ellery Queen and Sherlock Holmes—I presume it was Beardsley's random choice. But there was nothing random about his purpose! Don't you see, don't you see, it all fits! It explains the trouble we were having in recent months in getting total synaptic clearance! (*His voice borders on the frantic.*) I remember, now, I even mentioned this to Beardsley—and oh, the smug way he took it. He knew, damn him, he knew! He was getting there, he was reaching the synaptic, a bit of fiction here and a bit there, ECAIAC was being conditioned, unable to distinguish the real from the unreal—

COUNSELOR: Mr. Arnold! If you please, sir! (*Waits for Arnold to subside.*) I can appreciate how this discovery distresses you, both—ah—personally and in your official capacity, but be assured that your findings will be of inestimable value to future security. In fact (*smiles slightly*) Council has not been idle in its own pursuit of Mr.

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Beardsley's vagaries! (*Rises, removes a small screen to reveal a towering pile of tomes.*)

And now, Mr. Beardsley. I must really ask you to cooperate; I believe you fully capable. Are these your books?

BEARDSLEY (*adjusts his glasses, smiles at his books*): Yes.

COUNSELOR: And these charts, these graphs that we found plastered to every wall of your home. Obviously they are also yours.

BEARDSLEY (*adjusts his glasses, smiles at his graphs*): Yes.

COUNSELOR: Thank you, Mr. Beardsley. That's fine. And, Mr. Beardsley, what did you use them for? These books, these graphs?

BEARDSLEY (*groping, bewildered*): I—I—

COUNSELOR (*sees the futility of it*): Gentlemen, I believe we can proceed on the grounds of self-evidence. Let me read you a few titles from these books. "The Cybernetic Principle: Advanced Theory" . . . "The Synapse in Function" . . . and here we have "Synaptics: Pattern and Flux." There are more, many more in similar vein. (*Turns abruptly.*) Mr. Arnold. I'm sure you are familiar with most of these volumes. On the basis of the content, would

you say that you could duplicate Beardsley's feat?

ARNOLD (*aghast*): No! I would not presume to say that, sir.

COUNSELOR (*frowns; it was not the answer he wanted*): Very well, then. Dr. Trstensky . . . would you come forward, please? Dr. Trstensky . . . you are head of the Department of Advanced Cybernetics at Cal Tech. You have had opportunity to study these graphs and charts in minutest detail—

TRSTENSKY: Oh, yes-s. Fascinating!

COUNSELOR: I put the question: would it be possible for you to duplicate the grotesque feat that Beardsley performed on ECAIAC?

TRSTENSKY: Yes-s, possibly. No, I will say definitely. You mean, of course, cold, from the beginning? Yes-s . . . but it would take me approximately three-to-four years.

COUNSELOR: Yes, Mr. Beardsley? What is it? You would like to make a pertinent statement?

BEARDSLEY (*abashed*): Oh. It—I only wanted to say it took me longer. Four-to-five years.

COUNSELOR (*wearily—just waits for laughter to subside*): Gentlemen, I think we may safely wrap it up now.

Our function here is Disposition. Our choice is two-fold. One: the subject is sane, in which case he will pay the supreme penalty for murder which he has freely admitted. Or two: he is obviously insane, in which case he will be subjected to Psychic Probe as provided by law, thus restoring a measure of normalcy sufficient to place him again in society — restricted, of course—

DR. DOEBLER: Sir, one moment, if you please! I simply do not understand your language, and even less can I condone your haste! *Safely*, wrap it up, you said. What do you mean by that? Safe for whom? And "obviously" insane—was that a slip of the tongue, sir, or are you trying to force an issue here?

COUNSELOR (*coldly*): I must remind you that we already have competent reports on subject's status. Add to that the facts presented here; they are overwhelming; the man's own admission and attitude are substantiation. It is my considered opinion, and I'm sure the opinion of Council, that the man is insane. Subjection to Psychic Probe will restore him to—

DOEBLER: Oh, yes, the Psychic Probe. I have no quarrel there. *But suppose*

you were wrong? Have you ever considered the effects of Probe on the *sane* mind? Have you ever seen it? Once I saw it, only once. It is worse than disaster—it is horrible—it results in a sort of psychic tearing that heals and then tears and then heals in continuous perpetuation. It—is indescribable. It is sub-human. Compared to that, death or even insanity is a blessed relief. Now, gentlemen, listen! I implore you not to be in error! True, it was my opinion that Beardsley acted in fulfillment of the self-destructive impulse, but the man is *sane*—*sane*, I tell you, and entitled to a humanitarian death! My professional judgment—

COUNSELOR (*again coldly, glancing around*): Is welcome, but does not bear final weight, sir.

Silence closed down like a pall. Doebler's plea by its very impassioned nature had gotten through. It was a moment of embarrassment and indecision in which each man weighed his conscience, and found it wanting . . . in which every member of Council looked to his neighbor for solution or solace, and finding neither, turned back to himself, aghast.

Only one person looked to

WE'RE FRIENDS, NOW

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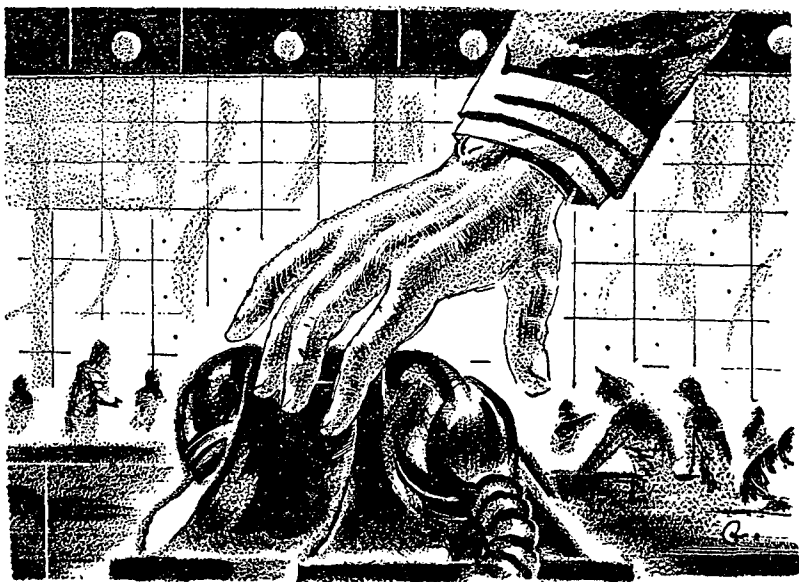
the true source and saw the solution as it would be, as it had to be. Pederson. Heart-sick with the knowing, he observed Raoul Beardsley and remembered! This funny little man . . . this ridiculous man . . . this proud man who had seized his fate and shoved it through because it had to be done, because he obeyed the dictates, because he had reached his Time of Assertion. Oh, Pederson remembered! And most of all he remembered Beardsley there at the last, in that final moment when ECAIAC had reached the wailing heights of sentience and grief . . . and how could he ever forget Beardsley's soundless whisper that seemed to say, "No, no . . . don't you understand? . . . we're friends now!"

Pederson remembered. He remembered, and looking up saw that Council had reached equitable agreement, and his

heart was sick and his soul was sick as he realized this was final, there could be no appeal. For the last time he looked upon Beardsley's face and saw that the man was fully cognizant . . . Beardsley also knew . . . Deobler had been right. Pederson turned his face away.

COUNSELOR: Now we are agreed, gentlemen? (*waits for general approval.*) Be it pronounced, then. Inasmuch as there exists a general area of doubt as to Dispositon; and inasmuch as it is agreed that further deliberation would be prolonged and pointless; and inasmuch as our faith in the ultimate function of ECAIAC remains inestimable, despite recent vagaries which shall never occur again: be it therefore resolved, that the problem pending shall be taped in all its detail and submitted to ECAIAC for Final Disposition.

THE END



THE RED TELEPHONE

By JOHN JAKES

ILLUSTRATED by GRAYAM

Colt had to find the traitor before atomic war broke out. One word would give him the clue.

IN THE affairs of nations—in the precarious dark-street games that must remain forever hidden, unguessed and unrevealed—now

and again there are happenings even more secret than the most secret, demanding a priority even more urgent than the most urgent, requir-

ing the services of a man even more trusted than those most trusted of all. A man, for example, like David Colt.

In a roaring thunderstorm a huge B-52 bomber loomed through the darkness at Offutt Air Force Base, its radar bleeping frantically, the eight-engine giant slowed ponderously and stopped. Before the engines had died David Colt had paid his thanks to the crew which made the emergency flight from Washington. Outside the bomber a jeep waited in the prairie rain. The driver, a lieutenant colonel of SAC, slammed into gear, u-turned and careened off between the strip beacons toward the fourteen-acre headquarters building, aglow with lights behind sealed windows in the Nebraska night.

Did the officer know much of the situation? David wondered. His light blue eyes studied the driver's face. "Lousy night," David said casually. "I'd much rather be eleven miles up north in some quiet little Omaha bar. Or in a Washington bar, for that matter."

The lieutenant colonel turned and stared hard, his eyes hollow, his face spattered by rain. "Nobody is in Omaha tonight, Mr. Colt. They've

been dragging them back for the last four hours." The officer's hand shook as he lit a cigarette and steered with one hand. "I wonder if we might be fighting the third world war, this time tomorrow."

David's nerves tightened a notch. No matter what the degree of knowledge of the truth on this sprawling nerve-centered base, they *knew*, somehow. Perhaps intuition came from courting death in their planes, high above the breathable air, waiting for the signal on the red telephone that would spell their fulfillment and their destruction. David's head buzzed. He'd been at a Washington party the night before, and wished now he hadn't. The jeep screamed to a halt. The grim lieutenant colonel pointed.

"Right through those doors, sir."

Halls in the vast three-winged building were crowded with white-faced, nervous men wearing blue uniforms and silver wings. Of course they did not realize what was happening belowground—nor did David, fully—but a red alert had been posted, and red alerts came infrequently. David's raincoat hung in soggy, humid folds. A colonel

directed him to the entrance underground. The mood haunting the SAC base was frighteningly contagious — those in below might be on the lip of panic. Of them all, David had to be calmest. It was damned tough.

Eight minutes after the B-52 roared down David was through the first foot-thick steel and concrete door and into a tunnel in The Hole.

Officers escorted him down through the operations and intelligence levels, down past the additional checkpoints on the communications level, past the decontamination rooms with their Sniffer fall-out detectors, showers and clothing treatment cells, to a final door with a one-way-glass panel. After a fourth search of his person David was allowed through that door into the command center, the very lowest level of the forty - five - foot - deep, two-acre underground warren of the Strategic Air Command.

He was in a glass booth which covered one wall of the center. The red telephone stood near, unused but checked for operation twice daily. David had never seen it before. He shuddered. General Mayes had used that telephone to call the White House in the late afternoon. A cap-

tain in shirt sleeves and no tie left his microphone. "Mr. Colt? General Mayes is waiting up on the balcony with command staff. Stairway to your left."

David nodded and hurried up, getting only a quick glance at the vast teeming floor of the center. He'd seen the twenty-foot-high fluorescent map panels with ladders drawn up before them, men changing figures and making marks every other second. The banks of computers, the color television cameras hooked to the Pentagon war retreat — the whole scene frenzied now, charged with dangerous uncertainty. He'd seen the unmarked maps on roller panels, behind which were ranked duplicate panels with the alternate war plans clearly charted out. *Who else had seen?* he wondered, running up the stairs. *And how much?* He must find out. The Hole was sealed off from the human world until he learned the answer.

As he opened the door at the head of the stairs, shedding his raincoat as he stepped into the glass-enclosed balcony, he heard a harsh voice:

"... and you spent the prescribed ninety days in train-

ing before you were assigned down here, Major Lawes, so you know exactly how long we can hold on. There is a two-thousand-foot well under the floor. Food for thirty days. Three Diesels for power and light. Everything we need to sweat you out, mister. All those people on the floor down there—they've got families expecting them home at the end of eight hours. We've been here twelve but we can stay here twelve days or twelve months if necessary, starving, and we will, believe me, until you open your mouth, mister. Until you tell us exactly how many photographs you've taken of the plan maps."

"The camera is not mine," said a haggard young man seated in a chair before a black bakelite table running the length of the balcony. "The lighter is not mine. I've told you, I've told you, it isn't mine."

The first speaker—a young-faced officer with ghostly eyes and pure white hair—spotted David and came through the group standing uncomfortably around black-haired Major Lawes who slouched in his chair with great dark blue rings of sweat under the armpits of his light blue shirt.

"Colt?" asked the white-haired questioner.

"That's right. You must be General Mayes."

Brigadier General Gordon Mayes said that he was. Briefly he introduced David to the four other officers on the balcony. Colonel Andrew Priggott, thin, scholarly; Colonel Oliver Bernstein, hair awry, chewing a pipe; Lieutenant Colonel Hutchinson Young, a tall, stiff young man well over six feet; and Major Francis Varelli, small, intense, bird-eyed, tapping his polished shoes without stopping. None of the men responded to the introduction with more than a grunt. None wore their jackets. All looked sweaty. The balcony was clogged with cigarette smoke. On the bakelite table lay a dozen black ashtrays heaped with butts, plus torn cigarette packs, pencils, several cigarette lighters.

Mayes seized David's elbow. His breath whistled between his teeth. He needed a bath, as did all of them. Panic burned in desperately controlled sparks, far back in his eyes. "Downstairs, please."

They halted just inside the booth below. David saw the red telephone again; beyond it, the frantic scramble in the concrete pit, the vast lighted

panels, the red figures being posted, erased, re-posted, minute by minute: number of thermonuclear weapons, number of crews on all bases as of thirty minutes ago, conditions of the jetstream, the wind off the Moroccan coast now and an hour from now—panel after panel, the story of a war that might—or might not—come during that very next hour.

"That man in the chair," David began. "Lawes . . .?"

"Major Jack Lawes, yes, that's him."

"He's the one, eh?"

"That's right. Colt," Mayes was curt and impolite in his nerves, "we don't think you'll be any better down here than men who know Lawes personally. However, I did request an answer from the White House—that's why I used the red telephone this afternoon—and since they chose to send you here, our facilities are at your disposal." Mayes lit a cigarette with yellow fingers. "I've been on Lawes for five hours straight. He's groggy. Or he acts that way. They are trained to be excellent actors." Rushing on, Mayes said: "Do you want to question him?"

"I'll try. Is he married?"

"Yes."

"Could you get his wife

down here? It might be a way."

"All right, if you think it's necessary." Mayes spoke to a captain at the booth control panel. The man began to telephone. Mayes returned. David said:

"You haven't said anything about an answer to your question."

Mayes leaned against the thirty-inch reinforced concrete wall, giving one short, tired snicker. "I almost knew the answer this afternoon. But tell me anyhow."

"Your request for permission to use physical torture on Major Lawes is denied, by the President."

"I expected that."

"It was thought I might help. Understandably, you don't believe I can, but you've been down here twelve hours. I've at least got fresh wind."

Mayes smiled, in a sad, ghostly way. "And executive blessing. How much do you know?"

David knew a smattering from a short teletype report and thirty minutes spent with the President in the muggy Washington twilight. Together he and Mayes verbally pieced together the circumstances:

Thirty-seven hours earlier,

the CIA had picked up on an unfriendly agent in Paris an eight by ten photograph which when wirephotoed to Washington, proved to be a section of one of the vast sliding panels hidden behind the sterile—unmarked—map panels on the top-secret lower floor of the Strategic Air Command control center, Nebraska. This meant that someone had virtually achieved the impossible; had penetrated to the most secret room in the United States; had photographed at least a portion of the maps showing how, and from where, SAC would launch a bomber and missile counter-effort in event of a surprise attack.

Investigation teams had been sent immediately into The Hole. They uncovered, in the wick cap of the cigarette lighter of Major Jack Lawes lying in the butt litter of the bakelite table above, an impossibly intricate miniature camera. Lawes denied knowledge of it. The security teams had withdrawn. The Hole had been closed until Lawes broke down. Mayes had telephoned Washington for permission to use torture.

"Do you *realize*," he demanded now, "what it can mean if all the war plans on

those panels have been photographed and sent out of the country? There will be a period of six months to a year when we'll be sitting ducks. It takes *time* to work out plans as complex as the ones SAC uses."

David nodded, chain-lighting cigarettes, "You're certain Lawes is guilty?"

"I think so," Mayes replied slowly. "That's not the point."

"The point is, how many photos did he take, and how many got out of the country?"

"Yes."

"He denies it all?"

"You heard him upstairs."

"How's his record?"

"What difference does that make?" Mayes replied bitterly. "He's been an officer since nineteen forty-four, but if he's been trained for some such task as this, it was back beyond that, when he was still almost a kid. He can probably outlast everything we throw at him. They usually can. Sometimes they can even survive torture for indefinite periods." Mayes bristled. "Excuse me for saying it, but the President sits in the White House and worries about nice-nelly scruples, and right now some clown may be pulling print after print of those maps out of a developing tank, and we *just don't know*.

We may not have a single strategy left."

"The point is," David shot back, "to crack Lawes fast. If we do that, the rest will follow—how much gone, how much left."

Mayes stiffened. "Think you can do that?"

"Let me try."

"Where do you want him?"

"Alone in a room on one of the upper levels. His wife next door, if possible. Wait, though. Wasn't there something in the short teletype you sent about four cigarette lighters?"

Mayes, half-way up the stairs, spun around nervously and gave a tight nod. "Colonel Priggott, Lieutenant Colonel Young, Lawes and Major Varelli flew in the same outfit in the second. The Tokyo milk runs. All men serving in The Hole have got flying experience. We happened to get four on this tour from the same outfit—who, in a fit of mad wartime comradeship," Mayes with heavy tired sneering, "had a batch of nice shiny lighters made up for all the boys, with wings and everything."

David's light blue eyes glittered. "I saw a lot of lighters and cigarettes lying on that table upstairs. Were the

lighters of the other three checked for miniature camera devices?"

"Of course, of course. Clean."

"There could have been a switch, if everyone leaves his cigarettes in the open."

"I think Lawes is the man," Mayes replied doggedly. "We have to start there. We have to find out, one way or another. We have to have an answer."

Mayes took four steps with two leaps. David called, "Any prints on Lawes' lighter?"

"His own."

"Did the security people check your staff first or last?"

"Why—" Mayes hesitated. "Why, last."

"Then any of the other three might be guilty—might have had time to make a switch."

Mayes came clattering down the steps again, furious. "Colt, you don't work here eight hours a day, thinking about how quickly we can all be blown and burned off this whole wide world, you don't understand the problems. Time, time counts. Every second. Every split second. If there should be an attack, we will have maybe twenty minutes to get ready, maybe forty-eight hours to decide who controls the world for

the next thousand years. Lawes has a lighter with his prints upon it which contains a camera. We must begin with Lawes. We must answer the question of Lawes first, because it is probably where the right answer lies. The other way around will lose too much time. Answer Lawes for me, yes or no, for certain, and then I'll start on the others, or you can. Or start on the others yourself, for all I care. Just do not spend more time on the others than it would take you to crack Lawes." His eyes burned down the stairway. "I beg you, don't play with two hundred million people that way."

"Okay," David answered in a non-committal fashion, gnawing his lower lip. He waited for Lawes to be taken to an upper level. His gaze kept straying to the red telephone, its lines hooked to the White House and every SAC base around the globe. Three or four words spoken into that telephone—there would be bomber death screaming above the air, missile death whispering above the oceans, cities vanishing in the flash, strange blubbery mutations crawling crippled out of fall-out ruins . . .

He shut his eyes. Time, time. Mayes was right.

Five minutes later he entered a concrete-walled chamber off a gloomy tunnel on the communications level. Major Jack Lawes regarded him blankly from a straight-backed chair in the center of the room. Without speaking David took off his tweed jacket and his tie and rolled up his sleeves. He used an extra chair to unscrew the bulbs in five of the six ceiling fixtures, leaving a single cone of light on Lawes. The sweaty young man, his skin pale and grimy-looking, continued to stare. Little colored lights blinked on the untended banks of coders along the walls. David extended a pack of cigarettes to Lawes.

"No thank you," Lawes said, not raising his eyes from the concrete floor. David walked twice around him in a slow circle, studying, Lawes' black hair gleaming with tonic and perspiration at the temples, reminded David of a photo he had once seen of the author Kerouac—a tired, mildly indifferent, blank face. That was the difficulty, thought David, beginning to sweat harder. The pliable wall of flesh. You looked, and looked, and listened to answers, and somehow you had to determine, ultimately on the basis

of personal judgment, whether the black unseen brain behind the flesh held the same truth as the words and the shape of the face—or whether words and shape lied, and the black rehearsed brain laughed. How did you ever know? Hunch, guess, belief. A red alert was up. To make it come out properly he had to make the right judgment. He circled the indifferent officer a third time, stopping.

“Major Lawes?”

“What.” Not even a verbal question mark. David waited him out. “What?”

“How old are you?”

“Thirty-seven.”

“Where were you born?”

“Cloverdale, Indiana.”

“Where is that?”

“Ten miles east of Vincennes, Indiana.”

“You’re lying, Major Lawes. It’s ten miles south of Greencastle, in the center of the state.”

“You know Indiana?” Little bored black lights flickered defiantly in Lawes’ eyes.

“It’s my business to know a few things. Why did you lie?”

Lawes shrugged, massaged his knuckles. “Seven hours old man Mayes has been talking to me, asking questions. I’ve told him the truth. He doesn’t believe it. You won’t believe it. The balloon has gone up,

as we SAC officers say down here in The Hole, referring to the next war, which I appear to have started.” Lawes raised his head sharply. “In all their minds, I have already started it. In your mind, too.” Lawes folded his arms, crossed his legs, turned sideways in the chair, distant.

“I don’t necessarily believe it.”

“Did the CIA send you?” Lawes said.

“I ask the questions,” David replied, deliberately, hardening his tone.

Lawes hiccupped, the only mirth his weariness would allow. Under the cone of light, computers blinking, David began to pace and stalk the circle again. Coming in front of Lawes once more, he reached down and forcibly tore the silver wings from Lawes’ uniform blouse hanging over the back of the chair. Lawes raised his eyes, glazed, curious. David held out the wings.

“Do these mean anything to you, Major Lawes?”

All pretense at humor vanished. Lawes was stripped down to indifferent grubby-eyed weariness. “I don’t know any more. I’ve been down here twelve hours, I may never come out again unless I answer in the way you want me

to answer. That isn't the way things used to be done. I don't know about those any more, that's all."

"The Hole must be closed till we learn who took pictures of the war plan maps."

"Not me," Lawes said, dumbly shaking his head. "Not me. I didn't."

"It was your lighter with the camera in the wick cap."

"No, not my lighter."

"You identified it, didn't you?"

"All four of the lighters look alike—mine, Varelli's, Young's, Priggott's. I thought it was mine—"

"Until they found the camera," David said cynically.

"Yes." Lawes showed a bit of defiance, his chin jutting. "Yes, that's right."

"How do you explain the camera?"

"Someone else had it in a lighter, and gave it to me."

"One of your three friends gave it to you? One of the men you flew with?"

"Someone else," replied Lawes doggedly, refusing to follow the thought.

"Do you know how serious this trouble is, Jack?"

"Let's skip the first name relationship."

"Do you know, Major?"

"No, explain to me," Lawes said with nasty sarcasm. "Ex-

plain all about it to me, mister man from Washington. I am just a poor little fly boy, I don't understand all the work I do down here, screwing around with maps and charts. It's just a game, I guess, just a . . ." He spun his back to David and glared into the dark. "You don't believe any part of it. Take me upstairs. Kill me. Just stop asking the questions. You don't care what the truth is. You want me to answer one way. I can't. I can't answer what's not the truth. *Leave me alone. It was my lighter. There . . . !*"

Smiling, Lawes snapped his head around once more, rising from the chair, bent forward at the waist, palms up. "There, *there*. It's my lighter. I was born in Moscow. My father raises potatoes. My mother is a little mother of the steppes. I never went to Ohio State, I spent six years in espionage school. *There!*"

Lawes gestured flamboyantly. David stepped back out of the light, having seen this reaction in men before, this giggling, talkative, care-nothing state which was in fact a drunken state born of mental exhaustion. Lawes stepped out of the light also, waving his arms. "My lighter with my prints. One of my teeth is a

bomb. We're all going to be blown up in five minutes. Better run. Better teletype the Pentagon. Better put your cloak on and pull down your hat and give me the password." Lawes grew less smiling, eyes glazed, talking for David, making gestures as if to draw attention to himself.

"Come on, the password, the password now, you Man from Washington . . ." And he lunged.

David turned his body sideways and shot out a straight right. The jolt numbed his shoulder. Lawes spun and went capering back across the room. David unbarred the door and stepped into the corridor. A lieutenant with a rifle tried to peek through the opening. David stepped across the hall as the door closed. He heard a bit of sobbing from the coding room before the door shut. He fished in his pocket, found only a broken cigarette in his pack and lit the ragged half. Mayes approached through the pools of light along the tunnel floor.

"Well?" Reproof had already been delivered, with that single word.

David puffed the ripped cigarette feverishly. "He seems almost at the point of hysteria, I don't know."

Mayes scratched his head.

"You *have* done this sort of questioning before, haven't you?"

David grew irritated. "Many times, General. But I'm not perfect. Neither would you be, knowing how carefully they train their people in dissembling. Years and years of indoctrination."

Mayes licked his lips, preparing for a fight. "Colt, I'm afraid we're going to have to do things differently now. I still have command authority in The Hole. I'm going to bring Varelli, Priggott and Young up here, one in a room, and . . . and . . ." Mayes thoughtlessly massaged the gold wedding ring on his left hand. ". . . and put men to work with truncheons. I don't care if all of them die, I'm going to get an answer. We can't wait."

"If there is another way of doing it," David said, his voice remarkably hard, "and we try yours instead, you could be finished in the service."

"I don't much care. There might not be any service."

"I was sent here and I'm going to finish it my way, General."

Mayes scowled and squinted. "What are you, a college-boy diplomat? Another nicely with inspirational UN

pamphlets in your pocket or something?"

"Any time," David said slowly, "you want to take me on, General, I'll be glad to oblige." He felt rash, full of bluff. He had no answer. But he said: "If Mrs. Lawes is here, I want to see her. I want enough time to complete things my way. Or I swear, General, if there's one man of higher rank left alive after tonight, I'll finish you in the Air Force."

David had never raised his voice. Suddenly Mayes looked away, shamefaced. There was a short silence.

"Right next door—Mrs. Lawes—"

It took but a moment for David to arrange that the interconnecting speakers between rooms be turned on, so that Lawes could hear through the speaker imbedded in a foot of concrete. David greeted Sandra Lawes politely. She showed no sign of recognition when he gave his name. He shut the door behind him. Sandra Lawes was a pretty natural blonde in her early thirties, warmly worn round the eyes and knuckles as all young mothers become in the early thirties. She made a bulky, sleepy picture in her middle-priced blue woolen

coat and the scarf tied over her pin curlers.

"I don't understand this, Mr. Colt. Has something happened to Jack?"

"Your husband is in good health, Mrs. Lawes."

"Then what's this all about? I left the children at home—they may wake up, the little one, Jack Junior, gets frightened if I'm not there—"

"Your children will be cared for," David said flatly, fighting his instincts and feelings to make the words come out precisely hard and right. "You may not see them for some time—some weeks, in fact, but someone will watch them."

"Several weeks?" Sandra Lawes tried to laugh. Is this a joke? If it is, if it's some kind of ghastly prank—"

"Your husband is a traitor, Mrs. Lawes. He was caught with a miniature camera which he had been using to photograph material of a highly secret nature in the command center. He is not leaving this underground station, nor are you, until we have a confession from him, or from you, or from both of you. What your husband has done is so serious, Mrs. Lawes, that we can't afford to have scruples. I'm sorry to tell you that I was sent here by

the President, authorized to instruct the SAC people to use physical torture on either or both of you. Time is vital, Mrs. Lawes. Your husband had refused to cooperate, so I'm sorry to tell you that we'll have to start with you. We don't have a choice. You'll be sent for within half an hour."

David shot from the room, leaving the young woman sick and gasping amid the coding machines. The door clanged. He signed the lieutenant to open Lawes' door, thrusting Mayes roughly to one side. His heart hammered. Sweat coated his chest, his back, casually dribbled down his neck, the sweat of nerves and desperation. He appeared to step into the room where Lawes was imprisoned but he made sure that he moved at once to the side of the door, his back to cold concrete.

Lawes swung around. He was standing on his chair in the shadows up near the ceiling near the metal grating of the inter-room speaker. Slowly he climbed off the chair. His mop of black hair shone, eyes were bright.

"That was Sandra I heard . . . ?"

"I left the speaker open deliberately, Major, so that you could hear the exact price

of your refusal to admit the truth."

"You'd touch her, too?" Lawes moved forward with the methodical slowness of a madman. "You'd *touch* her?"

"I'll kill her, if necessary, to get a confession."

"No you wouldn't," Lawes said. He seemed to be talking to himself. He scraped his feet on the concrete, a step at a time. "No, you wouldn't touch her, wouldn't do that, no. You wouldn't."

"I came straight from the President, Major. I have power to do anything I wish."

David stepped away from the wall as he talked. A raw animal sweat-stink filled the gloomy chamber. The coding machine lights blinked on, off, in many colors. Lawes reached out and down slowly as David went on: "I will take your wife Sandra and strip her and subject her to hurts and indecencies for a week, if that's the cost of having you tell the truth about the lighter."

Lawes grunted to himself. He reached out and down for the flimsy chair in the cone of the light. David peered at him, a crazy with doubt, caught in an agony of doubt, trying to read the flesh-wall of the face, the truth or the falsehood behind the eyes, trying,

trying for truth until his head ached and hammered with red pain . . .

Lawes caught up the chair, everything released. He hurled the chair. He followed it in a demented dive, screaming:

"God damn you . . ."

This time David had his head smashed brutally against the concrete; had fingers tearing at his throat, a knee blasting dull misery into his groin. He dodged, punched, managed to slip to the side and fumble at the door. Lawes was a maniac, growling, cursing, seeking to maim or kill. A hand folded in David's shirt. He heaved himself through the door. His shirt tore nearly in half. The lieutenant gave Lawes a boot in the stomach and dived against the door. David ripped free, panting. A strip of expensive pale blue Oxford cloth shirt material hung limply from the shut door's crack. Mayes glared, astonished.

"What was going on in there?"

"Walk with me upstairs," David said grimly. "I know now what we have to do."

"In the name of . . ."

"Don't talk please. You brought up the subject of time. There's one thing left to do." David gripped the brigadier general by the arm,

urging him along the tunnel, talking quietly as they walked.

From the control booth of the command center David stared out over the floor of the beehive pit below. He picked absently at the strips of his shirt. General Mayes came clattering down the stairs from the balcony, followed by the remainder of his staff. Thin, scholarly Colonel Priggott; pipe-chewing Colonel Bernstein; stiff Lieutenant Colonel Hutchinson Young; and Varelli, the major, tapping his brightly polished shoes. The half-dozen other junior officers ranged at the mikes and equipment along the front of the booth paused in their work, keeping their heads front but listening to every word. David surveyed the staff.

"General Mayes wished me to tell you that we have learned the extent to which the secrets of this room have been spread to the enemy. Lawes has confessed." David watched. An expression flickered here; another flickered there. Nothing telltale. Slowly he reached out with his right hand. He laid fingers around the receiver of the red telephone. "Gentlemen, I have been connected upstairs with the President and the Joint

Chiefs of Staff, who have been in constant session since nightfall. I have relayed the extent of the damage done to us by Major Lawes, and have received instructions in turn. What Lawes has done, has forced the President into a step none of us ever dreamed we might have to take."

Now the officers at the microphones sat rigid. Now men stopped on the floor, turned, looked up, pale, sensing somehow what was happening.

David jerked the red telephone off the hook. He extended it. "General Mayes, you're in command."

"I can't," Mayes replied. He shook his head. "I just can't." He turned his back on David and looked at his staff. "We will have to inform everyone in The Hole that . . . that none of us may ever leave here alive." He breathed with a rasp. "Lord have mercy on us." Then, swiftly, to alleviate the pain, he swung and said to David: "You received the Presidential order. Go ahead."

David raised the red telephone. Through the glass he saw every face turned, watching. For no reason his hand trembled violently. He pressed the telephone to his mouth. He stared down through the glass. "Open all lines." Five

seconds passed. Ten. He said: "Activate option B."

"*Nyet! Nyet! Nyet!*"

Colonel Andrew Priggott lost his masks and screamed hysterically.

David jammed the red telephone receiver down, ran forward, jerked Priggott from the hands of Young and Varelli who were helplessly trying to control the officer's hysteria. David rabbit-punched Priggott four times to unconsciousness. Mayes giggled like a child. No one could speak. Mayes managed to bite his lips and say:

"Varelli, get your butt down on the floor. It wasn't the real thing, it was a gag."

Varelli's brown eyes popped in horror. "A gag . . .?"

"Do as you're told, damn it," Mayes quavered. "Hutch, get connected with the switchboard and tell them to open the lines again." He pointed to the red telephone. "You heard me, open the lines. The phone has been dead for ten minutes."

Suddenly everyone in the command center jerked to frenzied life; except the fallen enemy Priggott, shocked at last into guilt by the final horror of the final demolition. David felt limp and running with sweat. He and Brigadier

General Mayes grinned foolishly at one another.

"Colt, I have to hand it to you. I never heard of a longer nuttier hunch. And Priggott—" Mayes stared down, shaking his head. "I would have sworn, of all my men, he would have been the most trustworthy. I hoped to give him a boost up in rank, some day soon."

"That's what he wanted you to think, I suppose, all the time he photographed, and when he switched the lighters. Now you can crack him—find out how many years ago he was trained, how much he transmitted. All the wheres and hows, now that you know. Oh . . ." David blinked. "Lawes. And his wife. Can I go down to them, if you don't need me?"

"You're asking my permission?" Mayes replied soberly.

David found a handkerchief in his back pocket and mopped his face. He wanted to

sleep eighteen hours. Mayes said:

"You couldn't have been completely sure . . ."

"Not completely, no." David eyed the red telephone and let the horror of what he had done—even in trickery—drop painfully away. "But I wanted to push Lawes as far as possible, with his wife. And one thing, General, that I learned a long time ago . . . no matter how far they—" He gestured at the groaning Priggott, trying to rise on all fours. "—no matter how far they're pushed, no matter the extremes of torture or mental suffering, there are one or two fundamentals which they can't alter or disguise with a hundred years of training. Just because it is a fundamental, screamed from the moment they're born. I've never known one—not one—who ever dared invoke the name of God." David added: "To bless or damn."

THE END

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THE ISSAHAR ARTIFACTS

By J. F. BONE

*Lincoln said it eons ago....It took
a speck of one-celled plant life on
a world parsecs away to prove it
for all the galaxy.*

THE following manuscript was discovered during the excavation of a lateral connecting link between the North-South streamways in Narhil Province near Issahar on Kwashior. The excavator, while passing through a small valley about 20 yursts south of the city, was jammed by a mass of oxidized and partially oxidized metallic fragments. On most worlds this would not be unusual, but Kwashior has no recorded history of metallic artifacts. The terrestrial operator, with unusual presence of mind, reported the stoppage immediately. Assasul, the District Engineering monitor, realized instantly that no metallic debris should exist in that area, and in consequence ordered a most careful excavation in the event that the artifacts might have cultural significance.

The debris proved to be the remnants of an ancient spaceship similar to those described in Sector Chronicles IV through VII, but of much smaller size and cruder design—obviously a relic of pre-expansion days. Within the remnants of the ship was found a small box of metal covered with several thicknesses of tar and wax impregnated fabric which had been mostly destroyed. The metal itself was badly oxidized, but served to protect an inner wooden box that contained a number of thin sheets of a fragile substance composed mainly of cellulose which were brown and crumbling with age. The sheets were covered with runes of *lingua antiqua* arranged in regular rows, inscribed by hand with a carbon-based ink which has persisted remarkably well despite the degenerative

processes of time. Although much of the manuscript is illegible, sufficient remains to settle for all time the Dannar-Marra-
ket Controversy and lend important corroborating evidence to the Cassaheb Thesis of Terrestrial migrations.

The genuineness of this fragment has been established beyond doubt. Radiocarbon dating places its age at ten thousand plus or minus one hundred cycles, which would place it at the very beginning of the Intellectual Emergence. Its importance is beyond question. Its implications are shocking despite the fact that they conform to many of the early legends and form a solid foundation for Dannar's Thesis which has heretofore been regarded as implausible. In the light of this material, the whole question of racial origins may well have to be reevaluated. Without further comment, the translated text is presented herewith. You may draw your own conclusions. Go with enlightenment.

-BARRAGOND-

Monitor of Cultural Origins
and Relics

Kwashior Central Repository

I have decided after some thought, to write this journal. It is, I suppose, a form of egotism—for I do not expect that it shall ever be read in the event that I am unable to leave this place. Yet it affords me a certain satisfaction to think that a part of me will remain long after I have

returned to dust. In any event, I feel that one is not truly dead if a part of his personality remains. Many of the ancients such as Homer, Phidias, Confucius, Christ, DaVinci, Lincoln, Einstein, Churchill—and many others—live on through their works when otherwise they would long since have been forgotten and thus be truly dead. Earth's history is full of such examples. And while I have no expectation of an immortality such as theirs, it flatters my ego to think that there will be some part of me which also will survive . . .

(Note: There are several lines following this which are obliterated, defaced or unreadable. There are more to follow. In the future such gaps in the content will be indicated thus: . . .)

. . . I expect that it is a basic trait of character, for spacemen must be gregarious, and although I am not truly a spaceman I have been in space and, in consequence, my character is no different from my ex-crewmates—at least in that respect. I think as time passes I shall miss the comfort of companionship, the sense of belonging to a group, the card games, the bull sessions, the endless speculation on what comes next, or what we will do when the voyage is over and we are again on Earth . . .

. . . I particularly recall Gregory. Odd, but I never knew his surname, or maybe it was his given name, for Gregory could function as well in one respect as the other. He would boast continually of

what he would do to wine, women, and song once we returned to Earth. Poor Gregory. The meteor that hulled our ship struck squarely through the engine room where he was on duty. Probably he never knew that he had died. At least his fate had the mercy of being brief. Certainly it is not like mine. It was ... given ...

There was plenty of time for the survivors to reach the lifeboats, and in our decimated condition there were plenty of boats—which increased our chances of living by a factor of four . . . I suppose that it was foolish to give way to the feeling of every man for himself but I am not a spaceman trained to react automatically to emergencies. Neither am I a navigator or a pilot, although I can fly in an emergency. I am a biologist, a specialist member of the scientific staff—essentially an individualist. I knew enough to seal myself in, push the eject button and energize the drive. However, I did not know that a lifeboat had no acceleration compensators, and by the time the drive lever returned to neutral, I was far out in space and thoroughly lost. I could detect no lifeboats in the vicinity nor could I raise any on the radio. I later found that a transistor malfunctioned, but by then I was well out of range, stranded between the stars in the black emptiness of space. After reading the manual on lifeboat operation there was but one course open. I selected

the nearest G-type star, set the controls on automatic, and went into cold sleep. There was nothing else to do. If I remained awake I would be dead of oxygen starvation long before I reached a habitable world. The only alternative was the half-death of frozen sleep and the long wait until the boat came within range of the sun I had selected.

I awoke in orbit around this world, and after I recovered full use of my faculties and checked the analyzer, I decided to land. I'm afraid I did a rather bad job of it, since I used the chemical rockets too late, and the plasma jets scorched a considerable amount of acreage in the meadow where I finally came to rest. However, the residual radioactivity is low, and it is safe enough to walk outside. . . . The life boat is lying beside a small stream which empties into a circular pool of blue water in the center of a small meadow. The fiery trail of the jets and rockets has burned a hundred foot wide path across the meadow, and the upper edge of the pool, and ends in a broad, blackened circle surrounding the boat. I came down too fast the last few feet, and the drive tubes are a crumpled mess inextricably fused with the bent landing pads. This boat will never fly again without extensive repairs which I cannot perform. But the hull is otherwise sound, and I am comfortable enough except for a few rapidly healing bruises and contusions. In a few

days I should be well enough to explore. . . .

I am surprised that this world is so capable of supporting human life. The consensus of scientific opinion has been that less than one out of 50,000 planets would be habitable. Yet I have struck paydirt on the first try. Perhaps I am lucky. At any rate I am alive, and my lifeboat, while somewhat damaged by an inept landing, is still sufficiently intact to serve as a shelter, and the survival kits are undamaged, which should make my stay here endurable if not pleasant . . . and we are learning a great deal about our galaxy with the development of the interstellar drive—not the least of which is that authoritative opinion is mere opinion and far from authoritative.

This world on which I find myself is in every respect but one similar to Earth. There is no animate life—only plants. No birds fly, no insects buzz, no animals rustle the silent underbrush. The only noise is the wind in the trees and grasses. I am utterly alone. It is a strange feeling, this loneliness. There is a feeling of freedom in it, a release from the too-close proximity of my fellow men. There is the pleasure of absolute privacy. But this will undoubtedly pall. Already I find that I am anxious for someone to talk to, someone with whom I can share ideas and plans. There . . .

. . . which I cannot explain. But one thing is certain. My first impression of this place was

wrong. The life here, if not animate, is at least intelligent—and it is not friendly. Yet neither does it hate. It observes me with a slow, methodical curiosity that I can sense at the very threshold of consciousness. It is a peculiar sensation that is quite indescribable—unpleasant—but hardly terrifying. I suppose I can feel it more than a normal person because I am a biologist and it is part of my training and specialized skill to achieve a certain rapport with my surroundings. I first noticed it yesterday. It came suddenly, without warning, a vague uneasiness, like the feeling when one awakens from a partially remembered but unpleasant dream. And it has been increasing ever since.

The principal impressions I received from this initial contact were an awareness of self and a recognizance of identity—the concept of *cogito ergo sum* came through quite clearly. I wonder what Descartes would think of an alien intelligence quoting his dogma. . . . I think it is animal, despite the absence of animal life in this area. The thought patterns are quick and flexible. And they have been increasing in power and precision at an appreciable rate. I am sure that it is aware of me. I shall call the feeling “it” until I can identify the source more accurately. Certainly “it” appears to be as good a description as any, since there is no consciousness of sex in the thought patterns. I wonder what

sort of . . . and to my surprise I *swore!* I do not ordinarily curse or use obscenities—not because they are obscene but because they are a poor and inexact means of conveying ideas or impressions. But in this case they were particularly appropriate. No other words could so precisely describe my feelings. Me, a rational intelligence, succumbing to such low level emotional stimuli! If this keeps on, the next thing I know I will be seeing little green men flitting through the trees. . . . Of course, this world is unnatural, which makes its effect on the nervous system more powerful, yet that does not explain the feeling of tension which I have been experiencing, the silent straining tension of an overloaded cable, the tension of a toy balloon overfull with air. I have a constant feeling of dreadful expectancy, of imminent disaster, mixed with a sense of pain and a lively—almost childlike—curiosity. To say that this is disquieting would be a complete understatement, this state of chronic disease, mixed with occasional rushes of terror. I am certain that my nervous system and emotional responses are being examined, and catalogued like a visceral preparation in an anatomy laboratory. There is something infinitely chilling about this mental dissection.

. . . and after a careful search of the area I found precisely nothing. You who may read this will probably laugh, but I can-

not. To me this is no laughing matter. I find myself jumping at the slightest noise, an increase in the wind, the snap of an expanding hull plate, the crackle of static over my radio. I whirl around to see who, or *what*, is watching me. My skin crawls and prickles as though I were covered with ants. My mind is filled with black, inchoate dread. In three words, *I'm scared stiff!* Yet there is nothing tangible—nothing I should be frightened about, and this terrifies me even more. For I know where this continual fear and worry can lead—to what ends this incessant stimulation can reach.

Under pressure my body reacts, preparing me to fight or flee. My adrenals pump hormones into my bloodstream, stimulating my heart and my sympathetic nervous system, making glucose more available to my muscles. My peripheral capillaries dilate. Intestinal activity stops as blood is channeled into the areas which my fear and my glands decide will need it most. I sweat. My vision blurs. All the manifold changes of the fight or flight syndrome are mobilized for instant action. But my body cannot be held in this state of readiness. The constant stimulation will ultimately turn my overworked adrenal glands into a jelly-like mess of cystic quivering goo. My general adaptation syndrome will no longer adapt. And I will die.

But I am not dead yet. And I have certain advantages. I am

intelligent. I know what faces me. And I can adjust. That is one of the outstanding characteristics of the human race—the ability to adjust to our environment, or, failing that, to adjust our environment to us. In addition, I have my hands, tools, and materials to work with here in the lifeboat. And finally I am desperate! I should be able to accomplish something. There must be...

... But it is not going well. There are too many parts which I do not know by sight. If I were a more competent electronicist I would have had the parts assembled now and would be sending a beacon signal clear across this sector. The pressure hasn't been any help. It doesn't get greater, but it has become more insisting—more demanding. I seem to feel that it *wants* something, that its direction has become more channelized. The conviction is growing within me that I am destined to be *absorbed*.

The fear with which I live is a constant thing. And I still keep looking for my enemy. In a strange, impersonal way it has become my enemy for though it does not hate, it threatens my life. My waking hours are hell and my sleep is nightmare. Strange how a man clings to life and sanity. It would be so easy to lose either. Of one thing I am certain—this cannot go on much longer. I cannot work under pressure. I must act. I shall try again to find my enemy and kill

it before it kills me. It is no longer a question of...

... Never again shall I wish to be alone. If I get out of this alive I am going to haunt crowds. I will surround myself with people. Right now I would give my soul to have one—just one—person near me. Anyone. I feel certain that two of us could face this thing and lick it. If necessary we could face it back to back, each covering the other. I am now getting impressions. Sensory hallucinations. I am floating. I swim. I bathe luxuriantly in huge bathtubs and the water runs through my body as though I were a sponge. Have you ever felt *porous*?...

... and that last attack was a doozer! I wrecked a week's work looking for the little man who wasn't there. The urge to kill is becoming more intense. I want to destroy the author of my misery. Even though I am still a balanced personality—polite language for being sane—I can't take much more of this. I will not go mad, but I will go into the adrenal syndrome unless I can end this soon.

Nothing I have done seems to help. For a while I was sure that the music tapes held the pressure back, but the enemy is used to them now. I am still working on the subspace beacon. The radio and most of the control linkages have gone into it. It looks like an electronicist's nightmare, but if the survival manual is right, it will work. It has to work! I dread the time when I shall have

to cannibalize the recorder. Can't help thinking that Shakespeare was right when he wrote that bit about music soothing the savage breast. It may not soothe the enemy, for it isn't savage, but it certainly soothes me, even though there's something repetitive about it after a half a hundred playings. My breast's savage all right. Fact is, it's downright primitive when an attack starts. I can feel them coming now. I keep wondering how much longer I can last. Guess I'm getting morbid. . . .

More nightmares last night. I drowned three times and a purple octopus gave me an enema. Woke up screaming, but got an idea from it. Funny that I never thought of it before. Water's the fountainhead of life, and there is no real reason for assuming my enemy is terrestrial. He could just as well be aquatic. I'll find out today—maybe. Just to be doing something positive—even thinking—makes me feel better. . . .

Got it! I know where it is! And I know how to kill it. Fact is, I've already done it! Now there's no more pressure. God—what a relief! This morning I burned the meadow and cut down the nearest trees surrounding this clearing and nothing happened. I expected that. Then I checked the water. Nothing in the stream, but the pond was *green!*—filled almost to the edge with a mass of algae! A hundred foot platter of sticky green

slime, cohesive as glue and ugly as sin. It *had* to be it—and it was. I never saw algae that cohered quite like that. So I gave it about fifty gallons of rocket juice—red fuming nitric acid—right in the belly. Then I sat down and let the tension flow out of me, revelling in its pain, laughing like crazy as it turned brown—and the pressure disappeared. No tension at all now. The place is as quiet and peaceful as the grave. I want to laugh and laugh—and run through the burned meadow and roll in the ashes so grateful am I for my deliverance.

Got the idea of killing the monster from a splash of rocket fuel on the bank of the stream and my memory of the pain in the early feelings. But it was nothing compared to the feeling when the acid hit that damned mass of green slime! Even though my brain was screaming at me, I felt good. I should put a couple of hundred gallons into the stream just to make sure—but I can't afford it. I need the fuel to run the generators to propagate the wave that'll bring me home if someone hears it. And they'll hear it all right. My luck is in. Now I'm going to sleep—*sweet sleep that knits the ravelled sleeve of care*—Shakespeare, old man, you had a phrase for everything! I love you. I love everything. I even feel sorry for that poor plant . . . of guilt. It couldn't help the fact that my jets set up a mutation. And being intelligent it *had* to be

curious. Of course, no one would believe me if I started talking about intelligent algae. But what's so odd about that? Even the most complex life forms are just aggregations of individual cells working together. So if a few individual cells with rudimentary data storage capacity got the idea of uniting why couldn't they act like a complex organism?

It is useless to speculate on what might have happened had that thing lived. But it's dead now—burned to death in acid. And although destruction of intelligent life is repugnant to me, I cannot help feeling that it is perhaps better that it is gone. Considering how rapidly it developed during its few weeks of life, and the power it possessed, my mind is appalled at its potential. I've had my experience and that's enough. Lord! but I'm tired. I feel like a wrung-out sponge. Guess I'll rest for a little while...

... and received a reply to my signal! They heterodyned it right back along my own beam. They'll be landing in a week. I don't think I'll take this manuscript with me. I couldn't use it—and somehow I don't feel like burning it. Maybe I'll make a time capsule out of it. It will be amusing to speculate about what sort of a reaction it'll provoke, providing it is ever read. I can see them now, huge-headed humans, wrinkling their noses and saying "Intelligent algae—fan-

tastic—the man must have been mad!"

The manuscript ends here—and of course we know that the "man" was not mad. He left behind a rich heritage indeed, for those few cells that escaped his wrath and floated down to the sea. Did we but know his origin we would erect a suitable memorial if we had to travel to the farthest reach of our galaxy. But the names he quotes are not in our repositories and as for the word "Earth" which he used for his homeworld, I need not remind my readers that the intelligent terrestrial inhabitants of the 22,748 planets of this sector use the term "Earth" or its synonyms "soil" and "world" to describe their planets. Of course, the term "Homewater" is gradually replacing this archaic concept as we extend our hegemony ever more widely across the dis-united worlds of the galaxy.

At that it seems strange that the unknown author's race should have passed. As individuals they had so many advantages, while we are so weak and individually so helpless. They could do almost everything except communicate and cooperate. We can do but little else, yet our larger aggregations can control entire worlds, some peopled perhaps with descendants of this very individual. It merely proves that Dannar's statement in the preface of his Thesis is correct. "United, cohesive cooperation is the source of irresistible strength."

THE END



IT HARDLY SEEMS FAIR

By GORDON R. DICKSON

ILLUSTRATED by VARGA

*"Sunset," said Creighar, thickly, tossing
the knife on the table between them.
"You cut him loose."*

FRANK Siah did not move. He sat perfectly still, in cold silence, one hand gripping the glass on the table before him. In the close confines of the camping shell, the air, thickened and heated by the temperatures of their bodies, seemed to ripple and distort Creighar's joweled, stubbled

countenance — made the man look boarlike, brutal, and afraid. That countenance stared at Frank in the lengthening silence as the moment between them stretched out like pulled taffy. Still, Frank waited. Creighar would speak again.

He did, on a higher note. "You heard me? Cut him loose!"

Face calm above his triumpounding heart, Frank rose; still without words, he picked up the knife and went out of the little camping shell. Outside, beyond the shell's own glow of yellow glow-tube illumination, the sun Alpha Celana was dropping under the horizon. Her orange rays struck full on the squat black forms of the forest's native trees; and flooded through with a halloween color upon the table before him, the two camping shells behind, the clearing and the bluey huddled shapes of the natives. The 'Daddy' of the native group — now a mottled shadow — still lay where he had been tied, spread-eagled and belly-up in the clearing. He said nothing now, as Frank approached him with the knife, but looked up at the young human with his wide mouth half-open and the pointed teeth inside skinned free of the lips. But for all the exposure of his fangs, there was no impression of belligerence or fierceness to be got from him. He only looked

stranded — tied down there — like a shark half-dead and helpless on some storm-wrung beach.

Frank cut the ropes that bound his legs and arms to the pegs driven into the soft, grey earth.

"You can go now," he said. He hesitated, then held out a hand to the native. "Let me help you. How do you feel?"

"Sick, sick —" moaned the Daddy, in his own tongue — but he did not avail himself of the thin, human hand outstretched; but rolled over, and over again, half-tumbling half-crawling toward the huddle of other natives, until he reached and was absorbed in the mass of their mutual shadow.

Frank stood for a second, stiffly, his hand still outstretched. Then he dropped it to his side, clenching his fist spasmodically. For a second he was tempted to order the native leader back and make him let himself be helped. Then he got the feeling under control and turned back without a word, returning the way he had come, but this time bypassing the shell where Creighar still sat with the bottle, and entering instead into his own. The glow-tube had gone on automatically with the fading sunset. He sat down on the edge of his cot.

"Have another!" shouted Creighar from the next-door shell.

Frank did not answer. He sat for a moment staring at the blank curved wall of his shell, then got up and laid Creighar's knife on the table beside his journal and the neat pile of his reports. He pulled off his pants, jumper and boots, arranged them neatly on the chair by his cot, and laid down. Once horizontal, the glare of the glow-tube in his eyes reminded him he had forgotten to turn it off. He made a slight movement to get up, and then lay back, closing his eyes against the light.

"Have a drink, Frank!" called Creighar, from the shell next door.

Frank lay still, seeing the light even through his closed eyelids.

"He thinks he's the big cheese, old Daddy!" shouted Creighar. "Thinks he can show me up. Nobody's going to do that. Nobody!" His voice dropped suddenly and his words became lost in indistinguishable mutterings.

Frank turned on one side, his back to the wall next to Creighar's shell. He imagined a box big enough to contain him, a box like a jeweler's box for a precious gem, all upholstered interiorly in black velvet. He crawled inside the box and closed the lid upon himself. Enwrapped in secret, silent blackness, he waited for sleep.

It did not come,

He opened his eyes with a

soundless sigh. Creighar was now silent in the shell alongside. Only a high murmur of voices came from the huddled natives, and drifted into the shell. He stood up quietly, extinguished the glow-tube, and on noiseless, bootless feet, stepped out into the dark night. The natives were still talking. And then, quite suddenly without warning, two more native voices spoke up from the darkness nearby, and away from the general group.

"—Great Monarch—"

It was the voice of the Daddy's favorite among the younger males, his heir apparent in this native group — the one Frank and Creighar called Shep. Frank strained his eyes through the night now, to make out where Shep might be, but nothing was visible.

"Get away. Leave me alone!" it was the Daddy, answering. Frank cocked his head in interest. He could follow the conversation easily — better than Creighar had learned to do in fourteen years. Frank had been given a quick course in it back on Earth before leaving for this job, last year.

"But Great Monarch—" It was Shep again, almost whining.

"What, incapable filth?"

"Are you going to die, Great Monarch? Because you said you'd tell me. You said you'd let me know in plenty of time."

"Die? I'm not going to die!"

moaned the Daddy. I'm going to give birth and be ashamed. Oh, that the old red-faced man should do such a thing to me!"

There was a moment's silence.

"Should I go bite his throat out?" asked Shep.

There was the sound of a blow in the darkness.

"How dare you talk like that!" snarled the Daddy. "The old red-faced man is my friend. Even if he is jealous of my fine big family, while he has only the one skinny, white-faced son. Fool that you are! Also he is a devil and very clever. Learn to be sneaky and clever with devils if you want to come after me!"

Shep whimpered. Frank could not catch exactly what he said. Something to the effect that he was a good son.

"No son can be good enough," snarled the Daddy. "Come now, we'll go back with the others."

There was a sound of movement away, and then silence. Frank turned and stepped quietly back into his own shell. The light in Creighar's, he saw, was still on. He paused to glance in. The older man was asleep now, flung down on the bed on his back — in a position noticeably similar to that of the staked-out Daddy. Had passed out? Probably.

Frank went into his own shell and turned on the glow once more. He sat down at the

desk, looked at his journal, and then opened it precisely to the page of his last entry. He read what he had written there, two days before.

July 36, 187 Celanadate. Started for the collecting station today with 1246 kilograms, powdered. Daddy. Creigh. and fourteen females and eighteen bucks. Plan to move slowly, taking three days to station and harvesting as we go. Blue, Butterboy, and Tiger left behind to keep main camp and guard scrubs, whelps, and the expectant females. Koko dead. Insect fever possibly. Creigh. ordered no autopsy, says would disturb the others.

Frank put his fingers to the coder, sliding it down to a fresh space on the page. He coded.

July 38, 187 Celanadate. Creigh. drunk and very bad again.

He hesitated. Then he went on.

He is completely incompetent. His object is paternalism in its most disgusting form. Slobbers over the natives half of the time and bullies and browbeats them the other half. Sober he slobbers; drunk, he bullies. Why he has not had an uprising is more than I can understand. He tries the same tricks with me. Sober, he tries to 'make friends';

and drunk, he tries to rub in the fact that I'm junior to him and under his orders. He is a pathetic old man whose day is done and doesn't know it.

The natives represent an investment and should be worked as such. I will recommend as much in my report summary. No need to say anything about Creigh directly. I imagine the Company can read between the lines and the very fact I've had to make out most of his reports for him should be sufficient.

Memo: Violation of the native taboo about allowing sunlight to touch the belly skin is evidently somehow connected with giving birth. Include for addition to training films. No use asking Creigh, for further details. In this, as in other things, he knows a tenth of what I do, after the training course.

Franks fingers ceased to move the coder. He sighed, closed the journal, and then got up and turned out the glow and got into bed. After a while, he fell asleep.

He woke up in the bright daylight of a morning well advanced. The natives, without being ordered to, had already gone out into the woods — all of them. Frank went next door to check on Creighar.

The older man was still asleep, looking even more disreputable in the daylight. He still lay on his back, as if he had not stirred all through the night. Frank stood looking at him for a moment, then turned and walked off.

He began to circle out around the area, checking on the natives who were already about their business of taping the trees. He came up behind Shep, who was just then starting on a new one. The sharp white flake of quartz rock Shep held in one blue hand jabbed out and slid down along the black trunk. The new wound in the tree gaped instantly, like any tight-stretched thing suddenly cut; and a small trickle of clear amber liquid bled abruptly from the walls of the cut, welling up and spilling down the trunk. Before it reached the ground, close below, contact with the air had already started to turn it into a host of tiny, reddish crystals. Shep raked his hand down the trail of crystals, carefully gathering them into a tiny pile at the tree's base. The wound in the tree had by now ceased to bleed. Shep licked at it with a thick, purplish tongue, and the liquid started to flow again.

Watching, Frank felt a sudden emotional shifting of his insides. It was a strange mixture of a feeling, in which he could distinguish only disgust, pity, and — yes, a strange sort

of jealousy of the creature he was watching. At least, life was simple for Shep. He only knew that he had to make the cut in the tree and lick at it to keep the ichor flowing. He did not have to worry about someone, somewhere in some laboratory, finding and duplicating the enzyme in his saliva that was responsible for the continued flow. He only had to worry about biting out the throats of one or two of his closest rivals (preferably while they were asleep) when the Daddy died, in order to succeed, himself, to the Daddyship of the band. Things were simple with Shep — simple and physical. He did not have to worry about promotions or being saddled with a maudlin drunk who made three times what you did because of seniority accruals — while you did all the work.

The pile of crystals was steadily growing at the base of the tree. The crystals themselves glittered and looked like prime material; the sort that, properly purified, would become a glossing agent no manufacturer of fine art varnishes could afford to do without. If things would just stay as they were, there would be no problems. Creighar would take enough rope to hang himself, sooner or later; and with a steadily expanding market on fourteen worlds, the Company would prosper — and Frank

along with it. And then . . . Promotion to a job Earthside. Or into business for himself. Or . . .

If only Cregghar didn't get them both into trouble before he managed to cut his own throat with the Company. And if those damn research chemists could be stymied for a few years more—

"Move over!" he pushed Shep sharply to one side and took up a handful of the crystals. Yes, he thought almost savagely, they were prime. Certainly prime. Probably the amount there in his hand was worth half a year's wages, *his* wages, if you figured end prices back on Earth.

A snuffling noise made him look down. Shep was looking at the handful of crystals taken from him and oily tears were running out of his black-pupilled eyes.

"All right, all right! Here!" Frank dumped the crystals back onto the pile at the base of the tree. Shep stopped crying immediately.

Frank turned away. There were a few crystals still clinging to the damp skin of his palm; and he took pleasure in brushing them off into the miry ground, where they at once disappeared. He took a step toward the camp again; but before he had gone further, there was a sharp tug at the back of his jacket. He turned about.

Shep squatted, holding out

and up to him at full arms length, a handful of the crystals.

"No, no!" said Frank, abruptly angry with the creature. "Not now, not now! We'll get them from you at the end of the day. You know that!" He pushed the arm aside, turned about and strode back to the camp.

When he got there, he found Creighar awake and up. Thick-stubbed and touseled, with shaking hands, he held a cup of coffee as he sat on the edge of his bed.

"Hi—" he said, hoarsely and uncertainly, as Frank came by.

Frank went by him without answering, into his own shell and took from the supply pack there, a package breakfast.

"Hey, I guess I really was hitting it last night—" Creighar's voice came shakily and invisibly from the next shell. Frank still did not answer. Opening it as he walked, he carried the package breakfast back out to the table set in the clearing before the shells. As the cover came off, a hot homely smell of sausage and eggs came up from it as the heating unit seethed. Frank sat down at the table; and Creighar came out and sat down opposite him, the coffee cup still held in both hands and these laid out now on the table before him.

"Bad last night, huh?"

Creighar said. The words rattled and tangled in his thick throat.

"That's right," said Frank, buttering his toast without looking up.

"Boy, how you can eat that stuff in the morning. . . ." Creighar looked at the loaded breakfast tray and looked away. "They out in the woods, already?"

"I've just been out checking on them."

"Boy, I appreciate your seeing they got out on time. After last night. I wasn't in shape . . ." Creighar turned the coffee cup in his thick, but minutely quivering fingers, looking at it. "Hey, how's old Daddy?"

Frank looked up at him for a moment levelly, then went back to his eating.

"No, no—" said Creighar clumsily, leaning his thick, bearded face forward. "I want to know. I love that old boy, I really do. I don't know what got into me. . . ." his voice ran down. He stopped and passed an uncertain hand over his jaw and mouth. "Got to shave. . . . Well, tell me how he is!"

"There's nothing to tell."

"Please, Frank." Creighar reached across the table for Frank's arm; but Frank moved to avoid him, and went on eating. "Listen — you got to understand. I know a smart young guy like you wouldn't want to make friends with an old back-country bum like me.

That's all right. I don't mind. But old Daddy and me — it's been all these years, even as blue as he is. And since Hank was retired, and you sent out to replace him, I don't—I just don't—"

His words stumbled, faltered, and fell. Frank took a neat forkful of sausage.

"Old Daddy saved my life once," said Creighar. "I ever tell you? He and I —"

"Too often," said Frank. "You've told me too often."

"Yes, well —," Creighar looked out into the woods. "You're out in the sticks this long — no family — no one to write to —" his voice cracked. "Please, Frank, what'd I do? I remember getting mad at him over some little thing — something nobody'd get mad over — but I can't remember, I can't remember what I did!"

"All right, I'll tell you." Frank finished the last of the eggs and wiped his lips with the disposable napkin in the package. "You had him pegged out where the sun could shine on his stomach."

"Oh —" Creigh. exhaled suddenly. His head dropped and he looked away. For a long minute, he did not move. Frank went about tidying up the package into a disposable lump. "And I knew how he felt about something like that, too," said Creighar, in a numb voice. "I knew —" he turned

suddenly back to Frank, his eyes pleading. "But I turned him loose right away, Frank? I just did it to throw a scare into him —"

"I finally cut him loose at sunset," said Frank.

Creighar's eyes dulled.

"Yeah," he said. "Yeah...."

He sat for a moment, then roused himself with a noticeable effort. He turned back to Frank. "Thanks, Frank."

"Don't mention it."

"Well, what the hell!" exploded Creighar, suddenly. He examined his hands, quivering about the coffee cup; and abruptly lurched to his feet. He turned and plowed back into his shell. There was a moment's silence, then the clink of glass and the audible sound of a man swallowing. "What the hell!" came his voice, once again, but stronger now. "They're only geeks!"

Frank stood up from the table, taking the lumped breakfast package with him. Creighar came to the mouth of his shell, a bottle hanging from his fist.

"We got to get them over the river, today," he said harshly. "Starting about noon. Maybe you better —"

"I've got paper work," interrupted Frank. "Your reports as well as my own. You take them over the ford." He looked pointedly at the bottle in Creighar's hand. "I'll join you later — unless you have some trouble."

Creighar followed Frank's gaze with his own bloodshot eyes until they fell down upon the bottle in his hand. He jerked his head up to stare back at Frank; and for a second his jaw crept forward, bristling and square.

"Listen—" he began; but the hard edge in his voice wavered and bent, his eyes turned aside from Frank's. The jaw retreated. "Yeah —" he said, "yeah. . . ." and turned back into his shell, lifting the bottle once more to his lips, taking one gulp after another.

Frank carried his wadded-up breakfast package to the edge of the clearing and pitched it into the brush, dusting his hands fastidiously afterward. Then he went back into his own shell, and sat down to work on the weekly reports.

He was still seated at the little work table there, some three hours later, when Creighar came herding the native group back into the clearing. They returned single file, some already weeping at the prospect of being parted from the handfuls of red crystals they each jealously carried. Creighar lined them up beside the piled and packed impedimenta of the camp, which had already been put in shape for leaving. Then he set about with a rough, but not unfriendly firmness, at the business of relieving each of the band of their crystals; and

putting these into carefully sealed bags.

Without exception, as always, they all cried and protested as the crystals were being taken from them. As he slowly wrote up the commissary report, Frank could hear them — and over the sound of their light, chattering voices, the hoarse bass of Creighar rumbling exasperations with a sort of clumsy, hairy-chested note of reassurance and sympathy that took, Frank thought, all the force and purpose out of what he was actually saying.

"— all right, all right—you aren't going to starve! I'll see you get back all you need to eat, you know that! Leggo, Shep. Let go, I say! Why the hell you always have to carry on like this. . . ."

He finally got their blue fists gently emptied and their shoulders strapped up with the various burdens to be transported. When they were all ready, he crossed over into his own shell for a moment. Looking out as Creighar strode past, Frank noticed that the older man's face was pale and sweating above the beard stubble. His eyes were twisted as if by pain and he carried one shoulder hunched and the arm below it pressed close to his left side. He was in the shell for several long moments — and when he came out he had a gun strapped to his hip and he carried

a bottle. Casting a look of defiance in the direction of Frank's shell (which Frank pretended not to see) he moved over to the line of natives, and with hoarse, half-humorous shouts, got them started off in the direction of the river and the ford across it, half a kilometer away.

Frank finished his report in the new silence of the camp and pushed the papers aside. He would have to be following after Creighar soon — but there was no rush. He felt an odd sense of satisfaction, although he could think at the moment of no special reason for it. After a moment, he reached out for his journal, opened it, and coded:

The worlds are full of old men who are eager to make compromises. They are too weak to keep their eyes firmly fixed on the goal of their ambition, but waver off in search of worthless little things like 'praise' or 'friendship' or 'booze'. There is no need to take any special effort with these people; merely remain firm and be patient, and eventually they will destroy themselves. This philosophy is, indeed, the cornerstone upon which I have begun to build the ultimate mansion of my success.

He closed the journal; and,

adding it to the pile of reports, made a light pack of these and his toilet articles. The shells and the rest of the camp could stand as they were. This coming night, across the river, he and Creighar would be putting up at the collecting station, half a day's walk from the far shore. Frank stood up, shrugged into the pack and strode out.

It was a short and not unpleasant walk through the woods; but before he was more than four-fifths of the way there, he heard voices borne to him on the light afternoon breeze, and he frowned. He stepped up his pace, down through a small ravine and up over a little hill, where he broke suddenly clear of the trees and had his first view of the river.

The band was still on this side of the water. It had not yet crossed, he saw, and there was obviously trouble.

The natives were milling about, Creighar was bellowing; and before Creighar, crouched in a tight blue knot on the ground, the Daddy huddled. Creighar had been working heavily upon the bottle he had taken, after all. His smeared words and hoarsened voice gave his drunkenness away. He staggered dangerously, threatening above the Daddy, his hand with the gun from his hip in it, waved violently aloft.

Frank went cold. This was

the fool sort of thing he had dreaded—that could get them both into trouble.

"Wait!" he yelled — his voice cracking and breaking upward. "*Wait!*"

He broke into a sudden, gasping run, pounding down the steep slope of the hillside with the pack bouncing and jouncing on his shoulders.

"Wait, I say!" he yelled. "Stop it!"

Below, Creighar swung staggeringly about to face him, the noon sun shining brilliantly on his red, sun-burned face above the beard. From the ground the Daddy cried out, a long, piercing note; and a chorus of native voices echoed him. Frank plunged to a rocking halt before Creighar.

"Put that gun away!" Frank shouted. "He can't go over the water. That's what they're all saying. You old fool, if you only had the sense to learn something about the language — you know it's taboo for them to go over running water when they're pregnant!"

"Pregnant?" Creighar started.

"Him, Daddy. He is!"

"Knocked up? Him?" Creighar roared hoarse laughter, shoving out with one thick hand, pushing Frank aside. "Don't make me split my sides. Him—" He lifted the gun; and Frank, desperately, snatching at the wrist of the

hand that held it, caught and wrestled with him.

"You did it!" shouted Frank, in the high voice of his youth and desperation. "He thinks he got pregnant from the sun when you pegged him out, yesterday. That's what that sun on the stomach taboo is all about. He can't go over the water because of what you did to him. Because of you! Because of what *you* did!"

"Whadayou —" Creighar stopped struggling suddenly. The gun wobbled in his suddenly loosened grip, and slipped clumsily out of it. It fell to the ground unheeded by either of them. "Whadayou mean, I —" he pulled loose from Frank, backing up, and his eyes went to the Daddy, now half-uncurled and looking up from the ground; and from the Daddy to the gun. And his face blanked and twisted.

"After all these years —" he said thickly, his voice sounding suddenly wheezing and strangled. "After fifteen years, and I nearly —" He wheezed to a stop. His eyes suddenly widened with fright. His mouth fell open.

"Frank—" he straggled; and his right hand flew up to claw at the left side of his chest. His face was red as sunset, and his knees buckled. Frank leaped to catch him; but he was already falling, a heavy, middle-aged man, and the two of them went down to the ground together.

Frank scrambled up onto his knees beside the sprawled figure. He stared in shock at what he saw. Creighar lay as he had laid so often in drunken slumber, as the Daddy had laid, pegged out on the ground. But this time the man lay still, his eyes open, his mouth a little open, all unmoving.

"*Creighar!*" shouted Frank.

He stared up from the body with panic-stricken eyes — and found the native group all around him. They had moved in to form a circle about the spot where he and Creighar had gone down. And as he looked up the Daddy began to speak. He was making a speech, a speech about law and custom and duty, to which all the rest hearkened intently, seated so close, one to the other, that there was no room for anyone to pass between them.

—And when it was all over (and not very satisfyingly over at that, for the human blood did not form neat red-dish crystals on exposure to the air, but soaked into the ground and was mostly lost, even with all the efforts of the most careful collector). there was only one of them who had

taken no part in it. And this one was Shep, who had sat to one side all through the process of collecting, crying and shaking both hands looselessly and helplessly upon their blue wrists.

"Not fair," he sobbed, as they all at last drew back from what was left of Frank. "I loved him. He would have been for me what the old red-faced man was for you."

"Love is a little thing, too small to turn aside for, answered the Daddy. "You saw him. We all saw him. Nothing is more terrible, nothing is worse, than for a son in evil wickedness to kill his good father."

He squatted down upon the ground, himself.

"But now," he said, speaking sorrowfully to them all, "we are without both the old red-faced man and the young. Let us sit down and weep; for now we are alone in the cruel world, and there is no one to guide us and care for us, and no one can tell what will become of us, alone and forsaken as we are, from this day henceforward."

And they sat down all in a circle, by the ceaseless waters of the river, and wept.

THE END

In the spring, a new-metal man's fancy turns to...

REMEMBERING

By DAVID R. BUNCH

SO THE autumn came. Finally. The tin birds screamed south under the orange vapor shield and a made moon floated splendiferously over our land. The trees folded up and collapsed into the yard-holes, and the big bags went aloft from Central, the big brown leaf-filled bags floating high in the air and ready to shower us with ersatz autumn at the press of a switch in Seasons. And those brown bags, emptied and collapsed, would float to earth and, looking like the biggest of all fallen leaves, perhaps be found by tin men, or Go-Now men, or strange bleary mutant men roaming the homeless plastic.

And then the winter passed in a flutter of made snow and crystal, and the men in Seasons, working hard and overstepping the bounds of good taste, I thought, went far back and made us a Christmas. It was a simple thing, but hard work, and withal poor taste,

I felt, this clothing the regular trees with a sheath of green plastic and springing them up in the yard-holes in December with a strange-haloed star. Who could care? Oh, who could care?

And then it was spring again. And I knew how much I had lost. Through the tag-end days of summer, through the autumn, through powdery winter—my Stronghold on Automatic, my needs expertly served by the self-run ever-ready Gad-Goes—I had sat in my hip-snuggie chair watching the months go, watching the antics of Central. Not even bored; not even amused. For I had set my blood to low-low and my flesh-strips to dormant, and I had remained the long days through almost as quiet in every part as the new-metal in all my 'replacements'. (For I am of Moderan, you see, where the people all are 'replaced' now in one degree or another, with new-metal

alloys making the bulk of our splendor and our flesh-strips few and played down).

But the spring—something happens in spring. The world slips round to unrest and something dormant shakes off the cold coils, slithers up and stares you silly with beady eyes. Or did a tin man, while I slept, jog a bit at my heart switch? It is a thing I cannot tell you, truly. One month I'm sitting calm as a cold ball of lead, thinking on Universal Deep Problems, my heart pistoning a slow steady Moderan rhythm designed to last me forever, my world a flat sea of smooth-time for me to float on. The next I'm in the crash waves, my heart pistoning a blast-beat, my thin green blood coming up to swell the tubes in my throat and choke me. I am thinking of her! And the summer day that she left me.

Or was it night? I have not been so well since she has gone. Or is it pride? Who can say, on such things, what would mean anything to another?

Sometimes I think I will rise to power in this land. Why not? I'll make scientists out of my weapons men. And the tin men. We'll throw this Stronghold into one grand laboratory of experimentation. We'll come up with an Ultimate Contingency weapon to make these Ultimate Contingency weapons

look like toyland fuzz bombs. We'll come up with such a blaster that just by thinking into the ON-OFF place I can obliterate whole countrysides. And then I'll say to Central, "Central," I'll say, "you have given me your last hard time. No more spring, see. Likewise, no more summer, see. Check?" And check they better will, or else. Oh, after that, I'll be a benevolent ruler. We'll sit in autumn and winter, all of us. For spring and summer are really dead, you know. All gone. —But perhaps I do not make myself clear. Who can, perhaps, to another?

At other times I think I'll make snakes. I have the blue prints. I'll throw my Stronghold into one big green-plastic snake factory. And let them crawl all over a gaunt land. Snakes! That is the symbol. What better to say what I have to say to all the world? And I'll train one special one to go and sit upon the roof which she is under. With him.

But perhaps all this will make you think that I am mean. Or jealous. It is not that—not that at all. But I am outraged by her stupidity, and I am hurt by something that moves and turns in the cold sections of my heart box when it comes spring in the wheel of the world's sad journey. I think it is mostly her stupidity that so outrages me. You see, she left me for one much inferior to me! You must take

my word for that. You must —you must—

It was not that I did not treat her well. She was my new-metal mistress for many a happy month. And then, as such things go, I guess she learned to love me. And I cannot blame her for that. Certainly that was not part of her stupidity. But, as women will, she wanted more and more, more and more of the time. What I mean to say is, she wanted to share my life, even help run, or perhaps run! the Stronghold. She wanted me to leave her life-switch to ON! But I explained patiently, as to a child, how it was better for her to have her life-switch to ON only while we were loving. And then we could flip it to OFF when we were not loving and she could go to lie under the bed and rest there like a stick of steel, or old plastic shoes, until I needed her again most sorely. Any other arrangement, as I explained to her time and time again, would perhaps lead to a lessening of my mind-force in Universal Deep Thinking. I thought she understood.

And then one day—it was summer, the heavy flowers were up all about and the ersatz baby robins were testing their tender wings and throbbing little new-learned songs—that day I grew careless. I guess I left her life-switch to ON when we were

through. I remember it was a time of heavy thinking. There was terrible trouble again on the space run to Marsoplan, and the Red Galaxy was again posing problems. I guess I left her life-switch to ON. Or perhaps one of the tin men — But I must not grow too suspicious. Even now it seems that every eye I look into is somehow guilty. Sometimes I wonder if they were not all making love with her when my back was turned in thinking. And when I think this, the green blood comes up in my flesh-strips so hotly that it is all I can do not to blast the countryside with a Maximum Fire just to let off my feelings.

But the upshot was, she left me that day while I was in my thinking room, busy. I know they must have helped her get over my Stronghold's eleven steel walls. They must have. I am, even now, still thinking up punishment for those traitor servants, and no punishment seems big enough to fit them. When I find out who they are — Oh, my revenge-needs grow and grow and overwhelm me.

And when I find her! which I will! I hope I have my revenge schedule ready. My 'boys' are out even now infiltrating all the neighboring Strongholds, where the inferior masters are, to find out which inferior master was the nature of her stupidity. And when I find her!!!

But you know, I have a

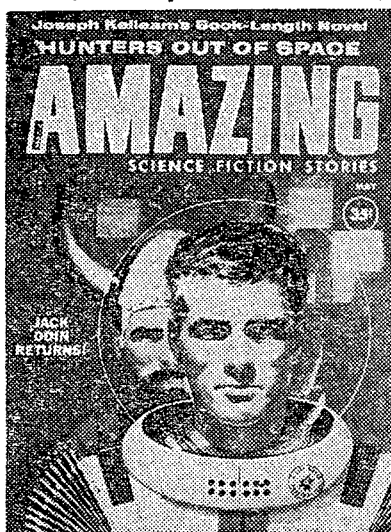
hope. Even in this heart-hurt spring, flat place in the wheel of the sad world's journey, I have a hope. That she'll come back? Ah, no. I have a hope that she'll be found outside a Stronghold. Maybe wandering over the homeless plastic, saying my name. Or perhaps 'living' in some yard-hole for trees, hoping I'll come to her to say, "Come back!"

But would I take her back? Could I take her back? There seems a guilt in every eye I look into. I'm caught with my green blood. I think of snakes, and will—until I know. And

who can know? About such things? —So it is full ahead with all my punishment schedules. And when she's found—and she will be found! —I hope it does not find my schedules wanting. —I'll rush that new machine through to completion. I'll leave her life-switch to ON! I'll let her 'live' while this new machine hammers her 'life' down to jellied atoms. For stupidity—well, stupidity is a most terrible thing, you know, (especially in the judging of ME against another)—and must have a massive pounding. **THE END**

COMING NEXT MONTH

Jack Odin returns in the May issue of **AMAZING STORIES!**



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The May **AMAZING** will also have its usual full complement of top-notch short stories and features. Be sure to reserve your copy of the issue, on sale April 12, with your newsdealer now!

"Every century has its advantages and its drawbacks," he said. "We, for instance, have bred out sexual desire. And, as for you people...."

YOU DON'T MAKE WINE LIKE THE GREEKS DID

By DAVID E. FISHER

ILLUSTRATED by SUMMERS

ON THE sixty-third floor of the Empire State Building is, among others of its type, a rather small office consisting of two rooms connected by a stout wooden door. The room into which the office door, which is of opaque glass, opens, is the smaller of the two and serves to house a receptionist, three not too comfortable armchairs, and a disorderly, homogeneous mixture of *Life's*, *Look's* and *New Yorker's*.

The receptionist is a young woman, half-heartedly pretty but certainly chic in the manner of New York's women in general and of its working women in particular, perhaps in her middle twenties, with a paucity of golden hair which is kept clinging rather back on her skull by an intricate

network of tortoise-shell combs and invisible pins. She is engaged to a man who is in turn engaged in a position for an advertising firm just thirty-seven stories directly below her. Her name is Margaret. She often, in periods when the immediate consummation of the work on her desk is not of paramount importance, as is often the case, gazes somnolently at the floor beside her large walnut desk, hoping to catch a lurking image of her beloved only thirty-seven stories away. She rarely succeeds in viewing him through the intervening spaces, but she does not tire of trying; it is a pleasant enough diversion. There is an electronics firm just five stories above her fiancé, and perhaps, she reasons, there is interference of



Donald was determined to make Mimi go back to
their world—dead or alive!

a sort here. Someday maybe she will catch them with all their tubes off. Margaret is a romantic, but she is engaged and thus is entitled.

Beyond the entrance that is guarded by the stout wooden door is a larger room, darker, quieter, one step more removed from the hurrying hallway. A massive but neat desk is placed before the one set of windows, the blinds of which are kept closed but tilted toward the sky so that an aura of pale light is continually seeping through. The main illumination comes from several lamps placed in strategic corners, their bulbs turned away from the occupants of the room.

To one side of the desk is a comfortable - looking - deep chair, with leather arms and a back quite high enough to support one's head. In front of this is the traditional couch, armless but well-upholstered and comfortable. At the moment Dr. Victor Quink was sitting not in the deep chair but in the swivel chair behind the desk. His glasses were lying on the desk next to his feet, the chair was pushed back as far as it might safely be, his arms were stretched out to their extremity, and his mouth was straining open, as

if to split his cheeks. Dr. Quink was yawning.

His method of quick relaxation was that of the blank mind; he was at this very moment forcibly evicting all vestiges of thought from his head; he was concentrating intently on black, on depth, on absolute silence. He was able to maintain this discipline for perhaps a second, or a second and a half at most, and then his mind began, imperceptibly at the first, to slip off along a path of its own liking, leading Dr. Quink quietly and unprotestingly along. The path is narrow, crinkly, bending back upon itself. It is not a path for vehicles, but one worn by a single pair of boots, plodding patiently, slowly, wearily. The path runs, or creeps, through a wild and desolate district where hardly more than a single blade of grass shoots up at random from the bottomless drift-sand. Instead of the garden that normally embellishes a castle (there is in the vague distance a blurred castle), the fortified walls are approached on the landward side by a scant forest of firs, on the other by the snow-swept Baltic Sea. Spanish moss hangs limply from the evergrays, disdainful of the sun and of its reflection by sea; the scene

is somber and restful, serene, and flat.

The buzzer rang once, twice.

Dr. Quink brought his feet down to their more dignified position, out of sight beneath his desk. His conscious once more took hold of his mind, only vaguely aware that it had not been able to achieve the incognito serenity it sought. He put on his glasses and the heavy wooden door opened and a man walked through.

He carried his hat in both hands, he was nervous, he was out of his element. He looked to both sides as he came past the doorway, and when Margaret closed the door behind him he jumped, though nearly imperceptibly, and advanced toward the desk. "I'm not sure at all I should have come here," he said.

Dr. Quink nodded, but said nothing. He judged the man to be on the order of thirty or thirty-one. His hair was black, curly, and sparse; perhaps balding, perhaps not.

"You see, I can't be quite candid with you. Nothing personal, of course. It just . . . Oh, this is frightfully embarrassing," he said, taking a seat before the desk at Dr. Quink's waved invitation. "I

just thought that perhaps, even without knowing all the details, you might be able to effect merely a *temporary* cure. So that I can get her back home, to our *own* doctors. Nothing personal, of course. I do hope I don't offend you."

"Not at all, I assure you," Dr. Quink assured him. "Just whom did you mean by her?"

"Why, my wife." He looked at Quink quizzically for a moment, then with sudden fresh embarrassment. "Oh, of course. You naturally assume that it was *I* who is . . . um, in need of treatment. No, no, you couldn't be more wrong. No, it is my wife. Yes, I've come to see you on her account. You see, of course, she wouldn't come herself. Ah, this is rather awkward, I'm afraid."

"Not at all," Quink answered. "If you would just tell me what your wife's trouble is?"

"Yes, of course. You have to know that, at least, don't you? I mean, do you? You couldn't possibly just treat her on general principles, so to speak, without being told of the immediate symptoms? You don't, I take it, have any technique that would correspond to penicillin, and just sort of clear things up in her head at random?"

Dr. Quink assured him that it was necessary, in psychiatry at least, to determine the disease before curing it.

"I suppose so," the gentleman said. "Incidentally, my name is Fairfield. Donald Fairfield. Did I mention that? But of course, you have all that on your little card there, don't you? Yes, I thought so. I do hope your secretary's handwriting is legible, it doesn't seem so from this angle. By the way, did you know that she is prone to staring at the floor? A spot right next to her desk. The right-hand side. I think I never should have come here."

Dr. Quink reassured him that he was free to leave at any moment, never to return. By a longish glance at the wall clock, in fact, Dr. Quink gave him to understand that he might do so with no hard feelings left behind. Mr. Fairfield, however, gathered his resources and plunged forward.

"I think you'll find this a rather interesting case, Doctor. Most unusual. Of course, I have little notion of the variety of situations one comes into contact with in your line of work, still I have every reason to believe this will come as a bit of a shock. I

wonder just how dogmatic you are in your convictions?"

Dr. Quink raised his eyebrows and made no answer; he was desperately stifling a yawn.

"I mean no intrusion on your religious life, by any means. Not at all. No, that is the furthest thought from my mind, I assure you. No, I am concerned at the moment with my wife's problems, meaning no disrespect to yourself at all, sir. I merely asked, not out of idle curiosity, but because . . . Doctor, I suppose there's no way for it but to explain." He gestured with his hat toward the desk calendar between him and Quink. "This is the year 1959, correct? Well, you see, sir, the fact of the matter is that I just wasn't *born* in 1959."

He stopped there, and the room relapsed into silence.

Dr. Quink looked at him for a few moments, but no explanatory statement was forthcoming. Dr. Quink removed his eyeglasses, opened his left drawer two from the top, removed a white wiper, and wiped his glasses carefully. Mr. Fairfield waited patiently. Dr. Quink replaced the glasses. He leaned forward across the desk.

"Mr. Fairfield," he said, "this may come as some shock

to you, but *I* wasn't born this year either."

"You don't understand," Mr. Fairfield wailed. "Oh, I just *knew* I shouldn't have come. When I say I wasn't born—"

He stopped, at a loss to explain. He wrung his hat in his hands until it was crumpled probably beyond repair. Then he jumped up, pushed it onto his head, and quickly walked out of the office. As his back disappeared from the doorway Margaret's head poked up in its place. She looked quite startled.

"It's all right, Margaret," Victor Quink said. "He was just a bit upset. You get all kinds in here. This one claimed there's something abnormal with his *wife*. Better leave an hour free tomorrow. He'll come back."

But he didn't.

He didn't come back during the following three weeks, then one afternoon Margaret ushered him through the doorway. He walked to the chair before the desk, looking neither at the doctor nor to the right nor left, and sat down, holding his hat in his hands.

"My wife believes she's just," he waved his hat vaguely toward the shielded win-

dow, "just like everybody else here."

"And isn't she?" Doctor Quink queried, with the patience due his profession.

"No, she isn't. But she's forgotten. She hasn't *really* forgotten. I don't know your technical terminology; she refuses to remember. Oh, *you* know. Her subconscious, or unconscious, or whatever, is blinding her. She won't face reality. And it's time for us to go back. But she won't budge. She claims she's normal, and I'm the one who's crazy. In fact, she was very happy that I was coming to see you today. I *told* her I was going to see you, but she persisted in insisting that I was coming here because *I* needed help. She said I'm coming to you because subconsciously I know I need you. Well, enough of that. I'm here because we have to go home, and if you could just make her face life long enough to admit that, I'm sure that when we do get home our doctors will have no difficulty with her case. It won't be so bizarre to them, of course, as it must seem to you."

"Frankly, Mr. Fairfield," Dr. Quink said, "you're not being entirely clear in this matter. First of all, you say you have to go home. You're

not a native of New York then?"

"A native? How quaintly you put it, Doctor. You might better say a savage, mightn't you? But that's neither here nor there. I am, of course, a native, as you say, of New York. I thought I explained last time. I am simply not of this *time*."

Doctor Quink slowly shook his shaggy head. "I'm afraid the precise meaning of your phrase escapes me, Mr. Fairfield."

"I am not of this *time*, Doctor. Nor is my wife. We are from . . . well, from the future."

"From very *far* in the future?" Quink asked quietly.

"Quite far. I'm not sure just exactly *how* far. Systems of time measurement have changed, you understand, between our time and this, so that the calculations become rather involved, though, of course, only superficially."

"Of course. Quite understandable."

"Quite. You *are* being understanding about this. Much better than I had hoped for, actually. At any rate, let's get on with it. For some obscure reason my wife has fled reality, and now that our vacation is up she refuses to return

with me, stating flatly that she has never, to make a long story short, traveled through time—except, of course, at the normal velocity with which we all progress in the course of things—and that it is I who am out of my head and though, while not actually troublesome, it would be thoughtful of me to see a doctor or at least to shut up about this nonsense before the neighbors hear me. Could you see her tomorrow evening? She'd never come here, feeling as she does, but I thought if you would come to dinner you might hypnotize her un-
-awares or—"

"I don't think that's feasible under the circum—"

"Isn't it really? I'm afraid I don't know much about this sort of thing. I'm quite helpless in this affair, really. I assure you I was driven to desperation to tell you all this; I mean, you must understand that absolute silence, secrecy, that is, is our most absolute sacred rule. Perhaps you could just slip something into her drink, knock her out, so to speak, and I could then bodily take her back—"

"Mr. Fairfield," Dr. Quink felt it necessary to interrupt, "you must understand that it would not be ethical for me to do as you suggest. Now it

seems to me that the essence of your wife's peculiarity lies in her relationship with you, her husband. So if you don't mind, perhaps we might talk about you for a while. It might be more comfortable for you on the couch. Please, it doesn't obligate you in any way. Yes, that's much better, isn't it. And I'll sit here, if I may. Now, then, go on, just tell me all about yourself. Go on just start talking. You'll find it'll come by itself after you get started."

"I suppose I asked for this. I mean, coming here as I did. I don't know what else I could have done, though. They prepare one for every emergency, as well, of course, as one can foresee the future, which is in this case actually the past, speaking chronologically. Your chronology, that is, not ours. I'm sure you follow me, though it seems to me I'm talking in circles. Are we accomplishing very much, do you think?"

"We mustn't be impatient," Dr. Quink said. "These things come slowly, they take time, if you'll pardon the expression. But of course, it's impudent of *me* to lecture *you* on temporal effects."

"Not at all, not at all, I assure you. I am no expert on

the time continuum, no expert in the slightest. I daresay I don't understand the most basic principles behind it, just as you aren't required to understand electromagnetic theory in order to flick on the electric light. In fact, I believe it wasn't even necessary for Edison to understand it in order to invent the damned thing."

"You know about Edison then?"

"Oh, certainly. I've studied up quite a bit on this section of our history."

"You're sure," Dr. Quink went on, "that you simply didn't learn about Edison in grammar school?"

"Quite. Oh, yes, quite. No offense meant, sir, but you must certainly realize that between my time and this there have been a great many discoveries in the manifold fields embraced by science, so that people who in your own time were famous to schoolchildren are now, then, that is,—oh, I hope you know what I mean—known only to scholars of the period involved. In the time to which I belong the schoolchildren may know of Newton, Einstein and Fisher, but of such lesser luminaries as Edison, or even Avogadro or Galdeen, they are quite ignorant."

"Galdeen?"

"Yes, Galdeen. Surely you know of Galdeen. Perhaps I'm mispronouncing it. Oh, damn. I'm actually rather proud of my knowledge of your histories, I hate to be tripped up on something like this. Galineed, perhaps?"

"Well, it's not worth bothering about."

"Damned annoying, just the same. It's on the tip of my tongue. Galeel?"

"Would you mind very much if we went on to some other subject? I don't think we're gaining much right here."

"You're the doctor, you know," Fairfield replied. "I was just explaining how I knew about Edison, though I never attended grammar school in this century. So, then, where were we? You asked me to tell you about myself, didn't you? You know, I'd much rather you told me about yourself." Fairfield suddenly sat upright on the couch, drew his legs up to his chest, crossed his ankles, and hugged his knees. "I was noticing that picture you have hanging on the wall," he said. "The sea, la mer, das Weltmeer, te misralub, et cetera. The roaring, crashing waves, the bubbling, foaming spray.

The deep dank mystery of the green wet sea. Marvelous, marvelous. Do you indulge in sex? I mean you, personally, of course, not as a representative of your species."

Victor Quink laid down his pad in his lap. "I'm not married, Mr. Fairfield," he said. "Do you often ask such questions of people you've recently met?"

"The sun came up this morning, Dr. Quink," Fairfield answered jovially, "the sun came up. You'll pardon my answer, of course, I was merely trying to top your own non sequitur. Many of your people do indulge, you know. In fact, it would seem, from my own necessarily limited observations, that it is more universal in its appeal than any of your other sports? Do you classify it as a sport? It's amazing, really, how these simple connections escape one until one tries to formulate one's recollections into a consistent line of reasoning. Have you ever noticed? Of course, though, you do it for procreation, don't you? Now I mean you as a representative of your species, naturally. Seeing as you are not married, eh, doctor," and he winked at Quink. "It seems to me, however, and again I insist that I am no expert in the field, however it

does seem to me that this matter of procreation is in many cases just an excuse; there seems to be an inherent taste for mating per se, or wouldn't you agree?"

"You seem to take a disinterested view of the whole business, Mr. Fairfield. Do *you*, ah, indulge?"

"Oh, no. No, no, no, no, no. I couldn't, thank you just the same. I'm really flattered, believe me I am, but thank you, no."

"That was *not* an invitation, Mr. Fairfield," Dr. Quink put in, "I was trying to—"

"Galui?"

"Mr. Fairfield, I was trying to ascertain whether or not you lead an active sex life, or whether your interest is purely, shall we say, metaphysical?"

"Yes, let's do say metaphysical. Rather clever of you, applying the term to sex that way. My estimation of your capabilities shoots up a notch or two, Dr. Quink."

"You mean to say," Dr. Quink kept up, "that you do not participate in the physical ramifications?"

"Oh, you *do* have a turn for words, Doctor. No, of course not. None of us do."

"By *us* you mean your cohorts in the future?"

"Exactly. You have an analytical mind, keen, keen. We do not die, we do not give birth. And I never would have brought the whole morbid subject up except that it has a direct bearing on Mimi's trouble. So it is necessary that you realize that sex is entirely foreign to us."

"Then," said Dr. Quink, "if what you say is true, your physical, let us say, equipment, must have degenerated. And so a simple physical examination—"

"Evolution is slow, my doctor, slow, slow, slow. No, I'm physically indistinguishable from you. Assuming normalcy on your part, of course. To continue along this train of thought, though, it is the mental process that provides the difference. There is no desire in me or mine, Doctor, no urge, no depravity, no sexual hunger. It simply died out over the eons."

"Since it was no longer necessary," Quink prodded him.

"Or vice versa. With the urge dying, it might have been necessary for us to circumvent the entire business. An academic question, really. The chicken or the egg all over again. But since we have conquered time, so to speak, it must have occurred to you

that there is no need for us to die, and thus no need for birth."

"You are immortal, then," Dr. Quink said, scribbling in his note pad.

Mr. Fairfield shrugged. "It beats sex. Which brings us to the problem we are discussing, if we can forget myself for a few moments. Mimi seems to have been awakened to the sexual urge, and that provides an embarrassing situation. Of course, its real significance is in relation to her problem as a whole, in the illumination it sheds upon her neurosis, yet in itself it is, as I say, embarrassing. Coupled with my complete indifference, I mean. Have you any plans for this evening? Perhaps you could dine with us without delay?"

Dr. Quink would not ordinarily have accepted such an invitation, being of that class of physician which believes a disease, be it physical or mental, best treated in the antiseptic confines of the office or hospital. Mr. Fairfield, however, struck him as being the altogether unprepossessing possessor of an altogether distinguished psychosis. He was, in fact, rapidly supplanting in Dr. Quink's estimation his previous favorite. Already

Dr. Quink was writing, mentally of course, the introduction to the paper he would present to his professional journal.

Throughout the automobile ride out to Long Island Donald Fairfield was quiet as, both hands tightly on the steering wheel of his new Buick, he alternately fought and coasted with the east-bound traffic. Dr. Quink forced himself to relax, to ignore the ins and outs of the commuters' raceway. He folded his arms across his chest, slumped down in his seat with his legs stretched out as far as they would reach, and observed the facial contortions of his driver-patient.

Fairfield's lips would twitch as he twisted the wheel and shot into the left lane. His foot pressed down on the gas and the right corner of his lip pulled back in sneering response, the sudden surge of the Buick seemed intimately linked to one muscular act no more than to the other. His eyebrows pressed intensely together, caressing one another, as the big car whipped back into line. A sharp outlet of breath between tightly clenched teeth preceded the sharper blast of the horn and then the Buick was swerving out to the left again with the accom-

panying lippal twitch. A car they were about to pass pulled out in front of them, initiating a spasmodic clutching of the wheel by the left hand, a furious pounding on the horn by the right, and a synchronized twitch, sneer, and muttered "goddam it" from the lips, repeated twice while the eyebrows maintained their position of togetherness.

Dr. Quink closed his eyes finally. There was nothing more to be gained at the moment from observation. The patient's responses while driving were normal.

Mrs. Fairfield greeted them at the door with a martini pitcher in one hand and a modernistically designed apron around her waist. She uttered little squeals about them being early and ushered them into the living room where she settled Dr. Quink on one end of an eight-foot powder blue divan before she left the room with the martini pitcher still clutched tightly in the one hand, the other rapidly undoing the apron of modernistic design. Donald Fairfield had not said one word since the front door had opened in response to their ring; none had seemed to have been necessary nor, in fact, possible, under the deluge of

Mrs. Fairfield's effusive greeting. Now he sat in the tilted green armchair in one corner of the room and, closing his eyes, relaxed from the strain of the drive.

"Your wife is very pretty," Dr. Quink said.

"Yes, she's probably the most beautiful woman I know," Fairfield said. "That's probably why I took her along. There's something about a beautiful woman . . . It was certainly a mistake."

"Feminine beauty is enjoyable even though you don't indulge in sex?"

"Of course, it is," he replied, with a gesture of annoyance. "You're still bound by that Freed—Freud, is it?—of yours. Damn him. That's really the main reason I hesitated so long before I brought her case to you. I was afraid you were going to place too much emphasis on the sexual aspects which, of course, by your standards are abnormal. It has really nothing to do with the problem, and I wish you'd forget about it, but I suppose you can't. To you, her sexual instincts will be normal and it will be *mine* which will appear abnormal, whereas in reality, of course, it's the other way around. You'll never cure her, I can see that now. But then, you don't have

to really *cure* her. If you can just get her to admit the truth for just a moment or two, just temporarily, I can get her back to some really competent men. No reflection on your ability meant, you know. I realize you're the best available in this age, naturally."

"Naturally."

"But you can't know that, can you? Well, take my word for it, you are. So suppose you start acting like it and get to work on her, eh? Could it be Gilui? No."

Dr. Quink bent over and tied his shoelace once or twice before he replied. He would have to talk to Mrs. Fairfield in private, of course, Mr. Fairfield could understand that, of course, it was not that Dr. Quink did not want Mr. Fairfield around when the discussion took place but simply that one could not achieve rapport without absolute confidence and, of course, privacy.

"Of course," Mr. Fairfield agreed. "I'll go up and shower now, perhaps I'll take a bit of a nap before dinner. I'd like to avoid that horrible liquid she was stirring up when we came in anyhow. Somewhere she's picked up the idea that one should offer those things to dinner guests, and I can't stand them. Will you want a pen and some notepaper?"

When he had left the room to trod up the stairs one at a time, leaning heavily on the cast iron bannister but making no sound on the wall-to-wall carpeting, Dr. Quink leaned back and had barely time to pass his hand wearily over his eyes in a circular motion that he found soothing when Mrs. Fairfield entered from behind a swinging door bearing a small circular tray on which were balanced the aforementioned martini pitcher and two high-stemmed glasses, properly frosted and rounded with lemon.

"Has he left already," she asked. "Well, shall we get right down to business? You call me Mimi and I'll call you Victor. What did you think of his story? Pretty wild, isn't it? But he's harmless, I'm sure. I'm not in the least bit afraid of him. Do you think I should be?"

Victor smiled and accepted the proffered martini. He cradled it in long fingers and, elbows on knees, contemplated his hostess, analyzing her physical attraction. He finally decided it emanated in the main from her almond-shaped eyes and in their somewhat mystical synchronization with her wide, sensual lips. There was definitely a disconcerting

correlation between them when she smiled, and as he was studying this phenomenon he realized that of course she *was* smiling.

"I'm sorry," he said. "It was rude of me to stare."

"Don't be silly," she said. "It was most complimentary. But I suppose in your position it's best to be extremely careful."

"My position?"

"Flirting with your patient's wife."

He put down the martini rather too quickly, splashing a bit over the edges of the glass, leaving colorless stains that evaporated in a few moments. "I don't want you to think *that*, Mrs. Fairfield," he said. "It's just that . . . that . . ."

But she didn't interrupt him to say, "Of course not," or "I was just teasing," or "Isn't it amazing how little rain we've had lately. Did you realize that this is the driest November in sixteen and a half years?" She just stared and smiled at him, and let him flounder and make noises until he gave it up as a bad job and took a long drink from the frosted glass he had so recently and abruptly put down. She refilled his glass and leaned back in her chair.

"Could you tell me about him, Mrs. Fairfield," he said then. "Start as far back as you can, please."

"All right, Victor," she said. "But it won't be much help, I'm afraid. Did he tell you he came from the future?"

"He said that both of you did."

"Yes, that's right. Both of us. And I refuse to go back, is that it?"

"Because of some deep-seated neurosis which he wants me to cure. His story is plausible, logical, once you grant the basic premise that time travel is an actuality. You see, Mrs. Fairfield—"

"Mimi, please, Victor. After all, we're not in your office, and I'm not really your patient, am I? Or am I?"

"Of course not. Well, Mimi, then, the first step is to break down his story. Show him for once and all that it is *not* plausible, that it is not even possible, that it is plainly and simply a lie which he himself has made up to hide something that he is afraid of. Once we can get him to see this, or at least to wonder about it, once we can break the granite assurance of his that he comes from another time, then perhaps we can probe into his festering se-

cret. But we can't do that, I'm afraid, until he begins to admit, at least to himself, that he *is* sick and that he needs help. In this case it shouldn't be too hard."

"My, you *are* brilliant. I wonder how you do it. Oh, you shouldn't gulp a martini so quickly. Here, let me pour you some more, but sip it this time. I know, I can't stand the taste either, but it's really the only way."

"Mrs. Fairfield—"

"Mimi," she insisted.

"Mimi," he said; then hesitated.

"Mimi," she prompted.

"I forgot what I was going to say," he admitted. "Cheers."

"Don't gulp," she said. "Here, I'll pour you another one, but sip it, now promise."

"God, it does taste awful, doesn't it?" he said, grimacing. "I don't think I ever *tasted* one before. Do you think limes might help?"

"We have some in the kitchen, but it doesn't sound like a good idea to me. Why don't we just throw the mess away and whip up something else? I just wanted you to think I was chic this season to serve *martinis*."

"What season? Football?"

"Hunting," she said, and the eyes and lips smiled together again.

"Mimi," Victor said a bit pompously, standing up and leaning over her, "I hope you are not flirting with me. You are, remember, a married woman and are, in fact, married to a patient of mine."

"First of all," she said, "you're being pompous. Second of all, he's not your patient, he says I'm your patient. Third of all, I'm not married to him. And fourth, of all . . . is it fourth or fifth . . . well anyway, fourth or fifth of all, let's try the limes. We've nothing to lose, it couldn't taste worse."

"First of all," he said, following her to the kitchen, "I am never pompous. Second of all, he *is* my patient because he came to my office obviously seeking psychiatric help but too sick to ask for it. I feel it only my duty to help him and besides, his case is fascinating."

"And his wife isn't, I suppose," she said over her shoulder.

"Third of all," he said, "and I ignore the interruption, what the hell do you mean you're not married to him? And fourth of all, it is fourth, not fifth, I think the limes will help immeasurably."

"Well, I think it all comes back to your original question.

You know, about telling you all about him, and how it started, and all that. You see, I can't, because I don't remember. Here, you cut the limes while I look for the squeezer."

While Dr. Quink was cutting the limes he didn't exactly talk to himself, but thoughts did present themselves to his mind with very nearly verbal exactitude. The immediate progression towards a solution of this case did not seem to be so clearly cut out as he had assumed it would be. There were, it now became more and more obvious, complications he had not foreseen. Mrs. Fairfield was not exactly acting toward him as a psychiatrist normally expects the wife of a patient to, so that, although he found her pleasant and indeed invigorating, if that is the word and he was not sure that it was but the only alternative that came to his mind, stimulating, had connotations that he was not yet ready to accept, although he did find her pleasant and et cetera yet he found her behavior also disturbing, in the clinical sense this time, and the revelation as to her distinctly limited memory should be described not as a disturbance but as a downright earthquake, to ring in a seis-

mological metaphor that occurred to him as he nicked his finger during the slicing of the fourth lime.

"Oh, did you cut yourself?" she said, straightening up from the lower shelves of a pine cupboard. "I'm so sorry, but never mind. Here's the squeezer."

The apparent non sequitur, coming in the midst of his thoughts that were already confused, bewildered him for the moment, but he felt it would be more fruitful to get back to the problem at hand and, blotting his seeping blood with a handkerchief, he inquired after her reticent memory.

"Oh, let's mix in the lime juice first. Aren't you at all anxious to see how it will taste? Honestly, men have no curiosity."

Well, as it turned out, it tasted pretty good. At any rate, that was the consensus of opinion, alcoholic as it might have been, as they returned with the pitcher of green martinis to the living room. "The furthest back that I can remember," Mimi said after they had settled themselves on the divan, "the absolutely first thing I can remember is relieving my bladder, if that makes any sense to you."

"As a matter of fact," Vic-

tor said, "it makes extremely good sense indeed. If you will pardon me and kindly direct me towards the wash room?"

When he returned after an absence of a few minutes, during which time the muted sound of snoring emanated from the master bedroom into the silence left by his absence, he attempted once again to take up the thread of conversation that had been so abruptly snapped. "You were telling me, I believe, about the first thing you can remember."

"Yes," she said. "Have another martini. Here, I'll pour. I was on a train, you see, at this moment when my memory begins. It was, by the way, eight months ago. As I emerged from the ladies' room I could not remember from which direction I had come. That is, I didn't know in which direction my seat was, if you follow me."

Victor nodded more vigorously than he had intended, and she went on. "I didn't know whether to turn to right or left. That's a frightening feeling to have in a train, not knowing where your seat is, when you're all closed in anyhow and you can feel the floor beneath your feet and the walls and ceiling all rushing

somewhere so terribly fast and carrying you with it and all. I wasn't really *frightened*, you understand, but anyway, as I say, it's a terrible feeling. So I leaned back against the wall and tried to collect my wits. But I couldn't think of anything. That really frightened me. So I said to myself, now just relax and think back to where you're going and when you got on the train and who you're with and everything like that and just relax and you'll remember where your seat is in half a moment. But I didn't. Remember, I mean. And suddenly I realized that I didn't remember where I was going or who I was with or when I had got on the train or anything, anything at all. I simply couldn't remember anything previous to a moment ago. I was scared silly by this time; and that damned train kept on rumbling and shaking and rushing on into I didn't know what. So I said to myself, now just relax and keep calm. This is all very silly. Now, then, I said after taking two deep breaths and exhaling slowly, my name is . . . my name is . . . And by God, I didn't know my own name! It was such a queer feeling I got goose pimples all over, just like that. I mean, I felt as if I knew my name, it

was on the tip of my tongue, but I just couldn't say it, I just couldn't remember my own name.

"Then I began to run. I didn't know where I was going but I was scared to hell and I just ran. I ran through five or six cars and the panic kept getting worse, and then I turned around and began running back the way I had come, just running as fast as I could and you know what that's like on a train, I kept falling against people and pushing them off and running and suddenly this man grabbed me and said, 'Mimi, Mimi,' he kept saying that and I guess some more and finally he calmed me down and, of course, it was Donald. He told me I was all right and to be quiet and what the hell was the matter with me anyhow. Well, to make a long story short, we got off the train here and stayed in a hotel for a while and then Donald bought this place and here we are. But I don't know if I'm really his wife or not. Did he mention sex to you?"

Victor nodded and she said, "So you know I'm not his wife *that* way, at least. And I have only his word that we were ever married."

"You don't have a marriage certificate, or pictures?"

"We don't have anything that would prove our existence prior to that date we were on the train. Naturally, he'd have left all that behind when we left wherever we were coming from. Any documents at all would ruin his story. For all I know he just picked me up at the train station."

"And you just picked up life here?" Victor asked. "As simple as that!"

"What else could I do? I was terribly frightened, and Donald was so calm and assuring. I didn't really think I had lost my memory, you know. I mean, I *couldn't* believe it. I didn't seem bewildered or anything, I just could not remember anything. Am I making sense? Anyway, I felt it would all come back to me any moment, and I went on living from one moment to another, and here I am and I still can't remember anything."

"What was Donald's reaction when you told him you didn't know who you were?" Victor asked her.

"As a matter of fact, I didn't tell him right away. I was so afraid, I just went along with him . . . Oh, it's so hard to explain."

"He didn't realize that you

were acting strange, bewildered?"

"Well, you know," Mimi said, "we're not talking about a normal man, remember. I suppose if I acted sort of, you know, lost, he attributed it to our recent trip through time. I don't know. Anyhow, he seemed to accept me."

"Let's get back to this time travel bit. When did you realize that he thought you had both come from another time?"

"The limes really make the drink, don't they?" she asked. "Well, it came out sort of gradually. I'd listen to him really closely whenever he talked about the past, naturally. I was trying to find out about me without telling him, I thought he'd get all excited and all, and of course he did when I finally told him but by then it was all so different and I'm afraid I've gotten confused. Where was I? Oh, you need a refill."

"Thank you," Victor said, "I forget myself exactly where it was you were. Is that right? Where you was it were? No, I'm sure *that's* wrong. Where were you it was, I think. Does that sound better to you?"

"Isn't that peculiar?" she answered. "Could it be where I was you weren't? No, now

I'm being silly, and I can't for the life of me understand why. After all, this is a serious affair. Or at least I wish it were. Was."

"What?"

"I remember, damn it," she said. "We were talking about *Donald* again. Well, he kept making these remarks about coming through time and of course I didn't understand what the hell he was talking about but I thought because of my not remembering anything and all that I better just not say anything so I didn't, but he kept on and little by little I got the idea, the general idea anyhow, but what on earth could I do about it? And then he started talking about it was time to go back and all that, and I certainly wasn't going to go floating off in any old *time* machine whether he was nuts or not so I just kept putting him off the best I could but he started getting so impatient that finally—what was that? I think there's something wrong."

They both sat suddenly quite still and listened, but they heard nothing.

"I hear nothing," Victor said.

"That's it," Mimi hissed. "He's not snoring anymore. He'll be here any minute. Act

natural. Have another martini."

"Thank you, perhaps just one more," Victor said as Donald Fairfield came into the room.

He strode across the room crossing in front of them without turning his head or acknowledging their presence and made straight for the buffet in the opposite corner. He bent over and extracted a thick black cigar, struck a match, lit the cigar, puffed several times, dropped the match into a gigantic ash-tray made of marble, or something that looked like marble, puffed several more times, finally inhaled deeply and exhaled slowly before he turned and nodded at his two spectators. "You make better cigars than we do, I'll say that for the twentieth century," he complimented Victor in the manner of all tourists, as if Victor himself were the cause and not the product of his age. "One of the mysteries of history," he continued, "how a simple technique, like making a good cigar or a good mummy, can be lost once it's been perfected. Always seems to be though. Each age has its secrets. You can't make wine now like the ancient Greeks did."

"As," Mimi interpolated. "As the Greeks did."

"I hate to be bombastic," Donald answered her, "not to say dogmatic or pedagogical, or impecunious too, for that matter, at least in this particular day and age, but I believe my original adjectival usage to be the correct one."

"If your thought had called for an adjective," Mimi countered, "but properly, according to the accepted grammar of the present day, that is, you should have used an adverb."

"Whatchamacallit tastes good *like* a dum-dum cigarette should," Victor put in, in an attempt to settle the subject.

"That's ridiculous," Donald answered, "it's completely wrong."

"I *know* it's wrong," Victor cried, "that's the point, *everybody* knows it's—"

"Of course it is," Mimi agreed. "Why on earth *should* a cigarette taste good? Who says it should? If one wants to taste something good, why then one takes a bite of cake, or a smidgin of candy, or a plate of cold borscht. If one cares for borscht. But you certainly don't smoke a cigarette to taste something good, they all taste horrible. Horribly? Oh damn, look what you started, Donald."

Now I can't think straight. Anyhow, people smoke because of the phallic symbolism, right, Victor?"

Donald looked with distaste from Mimi to the big black cigar he was holding in his right hand, and thence to Victor for a denial. Victor, however, shrugged his shoulders, and murmured something to the effect that this consideration might possibly have some bearing on the subject, that it was really a matter of interest more to the applied psychologists and advertising men than to the pure scientist or doctor, and that even so it didn't necessarily follow that—

"You're hedging," Mimi said. "All you have to do is watch a woman smoke and then watch a man and—"

"I thought we were talking about wine," Donald interrupted, crushing out his cigar in the oversize marble, or nearly so, ashtray. "What were we saying about it?"

"You were commenting on the relative excellence of our wines and those of the Greeks," Victor told him. "I was wondering if perhaps you've visited them too?"

Donald Fairfield did not answer the query. He stared at Victor contemplatively, drew in a deep lungful of

acid smoke-filled air from above the smoldering ashtray, and let it out again. "This is not going to be as simple an affair as it should be," he said finally. "I can see that now, but I suppose there's nothing to be done but to see it through. I take it you've settled everything between the two of you while I've been gone?"

"Oh my," Mimi ejaculated, "I've got to see about dinner. See if you two can find something to talk about while I'm gone." She hurried out of the room, one hand already reaching for the apron of the modernistic design as she passed through the swinging door into the kitchen.

"Well," Donald began, "what did you discover from my little wife?"

"To begin with," Victor answered him, "she seems to have lost her memory. Everything previous to an experience on the train some eight months ago is a total blank. Were you aware of this?"

"I was not only aware of it, I told you about it," Donald answered. "What in God's creation is this moldy brew?" he asked after taking a deep gulp from the lip of the pitcher and spitting most

of it into the first ashtray he could reach.

"Lime martinis, like a daiquiri, only dryer. If you don't care for them you might refill my glass. That's right, you did tell me she didn't remember, but of course—"

"You didn't believe me," Donald finished for him. "Naturally. Look, Dr. Quink, I think I'm a reasonable man. Damn it, I *know* I am. I don't expect you to believe me right off the rat when I walk in and tell you—"

"Bat," Victor interrupted.

"I beg your pardon," Donald countered.

"Bat. Right off the. Not rat, right off the bat. It's a colloquialism, comes from baseball, that's a sport we play. Perhaps you haven't come across it, if you've only been here some eight months?"

"Yes, just about eight months. I've heard of the sport, of course, but haven't gone to see a game yet. Do you think it's worth my while?"

"Probably not. Strictly a partisan sport."

"Yes, I see your point. Not an idiom, you wouldn't say?"

"No, definitely not," Victor said. "Takes time to make an idiom, but only God can

make a tree. O Lord, I better have another martini. Would you pour, I think I might miss. Still, a colloquialism, not a doubt about it. The expression hasn't lasted to your day, I take it? If it had, then it might be an idiom. Might, I say, only might. I promise nothing."

"And quite right you are," Donald said. "Still, I want you to understand that I don't expect you to believe me right off the bat when I wander into your busy little office and tell you—by the way, what is your receptionist doing always staring at the floor right next to her desk?"

"She's in love. He's an advertising man."

"Oh, well yes, of course. When I tell you I come from the future. Obviously you're not going to accept that right off the rat, as I say. I mean, no one could expect you to. However, after talking at length to me in your office and then holding a private conversation with my wife, you should, I think, as a trained and highly competent psychiatrist, certainly the foremost of your day—"

At this point Victor had waved a deprecating hand.

"Please allow me to say that I am certainly a better

judge of your position in this world than you could possibly be. Seeing it in the proper perspective, I mean. I did not intend to compliment you when I described you as I just did, I merely state a fact already known to my confreres. Then you should, as I say, under these most favorable circumstances, and certainly being forewarned, then you should be able to tell who is suffering from a delusion and who is not. Apart from what the delusion is, and whether or not you choose to believe in it, simply studying the behavior of the people involved, you should be able to tell who is acting normally and who is not."

"I agree with you in every particular," Victor said. "I certainly should. And I think I can, and have. In point of fact—"

"Dinner is ready," Mimi said. "And no shop talk, please. I want you to taste my squash and applesauce piece. And no one, absolutely no one, comes into my dining room with a stinking black cigar."

"Could it be Galilililu?" Donald murmured. "Damn."

"This is excellent," Victor said. "How do you make it?"

"Why, thank you," Mimi

replied. "It's very simple. You just take the squash and then pour in the applesauce and cinnamon."

"There must be more to it than that," Victor insisted, smiling around a mouthful.

"Of course there is," she said. "But I'm not telling you all my secrets. You'll have to come back if you want it again."

"Damn it," said Donald, "stop jibber-jabbering! We know why we're here, so let's talk about it. Can you cure my crazy wife?"

"Donald!" Mimi spluttered.

"Now, Mr. Fairfield," Victor said, "let's not be unfair. Your wife has amnesia, but she's not crazy. As a matter of fact, psychiatrists no longer recognize the term as such—"

"Pass the roast," Donald said. "Do you think I'm crazy or don't you?"

"I most certainly do not!"

"Do you think I was born in the future?"

"Mr. Fairfield, talking like this isn't getting us anywhere. Now Mimi—I'm sorry, Mrs. Fairfield—doesn't remember anything previous to that train ride we were talking about . . ."

"Naturally," Donald said. "That's when we got here. We'll skip the technicalities,

but it's always easier to land on something that's moving. Standard procedure. I don't really understand it myself, but I'm no engineer. We landed in the twentieth century—is it the twentieth or the twenty-first?”

“The twentieth,” Victor assured him.

“Isn't that silly of me. I'm always getting mixed up. It doesn't make much difference, though, you know. Not much of a change from one to the other. Not like the nineteenth and twentieth, nothing like that at all. Do you ever find yourself wondering if it's the twentieth of the month or the twenty-first?”

“I have a calendar on my desk.”

“Oh,” Donald mused. “I didn't notice it.” He stared intently at Victor Quink while he munched his celery. “It's not hard to see why you've risen to the top of your profession. Calendar on your desk, eh?” He looked at his wife and tapped the side of his head significantly.

“You landed aboard this train some eight months ago,” Dr. Quink prompted. “What are you doing here, anyhow? Are you an historian?”

“Nonsense,” he replied at

once. “Haven't you noticed all the books you people are writing? Every one of your presidents, every general, every field-marshal, every scientist, manufacturer, tennis star, and juvenile delinquent has written a book, or at least a serial for the *Post*. No reason at all for any historian to come back to this particular age. No other age in all history, I might add, has been so fond of itself or so cognizant of the need for preserving itself and its records for posterity as has yours. And with very little reason. But of course that last is only a personal observation, and I may be prejudiced, having lived here, so to speak, for these past months. You get to see the seamy side of a civilization, you know, when you live there yourself. Incidentally, would you be interested to know how your age has been classified by posterity? Of course you would, silly of me to ask. Well, to get on with it, you know how historians are always *naming* periods, and groups, and whatever. The Age of Darkness, you remember, then the Age of Awakening, the Age of Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, et cetera? As it turns out, you've come down to us as the Age of

Verbiage. Amusing, eh? No? Well, you can't please everybody. I thought it was cute. But in answer to your question I'll have to say no, I'm just a tourist. I'm on vacation. Nothing more sensational than that, I'm afraid."

"And naturally you took your wife with you," Victor added.

Donald looked down at his plate for just a moment or two, then answered "naturally," without raising his eyes at all.

"Somehow, Mr. Fairfield," Victor said, "somehow I get the feeling you're holding out on me, you're not telling me all."

"Damn it, the more I tell you the less you believe. I never should have told you the truth at all. I should have just said my wife's suffering from amnesia and let it go at that."

"I'm not an engineer either," Victor answered. "I can't just twist a screw and restore the proper functioning of the memory mechanism. I've got to know the whole truth, Mr. Fairfield, the whole truth."

"How come my wife is Mimi and I'm Mr. Fairfield?"

"I'm sorry," Victor stammered, "I—"

"Donald, you're embarrassing him," Mimi interrupted.

"Just joshing, pulling your toe, or leg, or some such," Donald assured him. "We might as well be friends, at least. Make it Donald too. I might even take your autograph back with me. I think the fights are on television. Want to watch?"

"I'll just do up the dishes, dear," Mimi said.

"I'm afraid I don't care much for the prize fights," Victor said.

"Just sit where you are then, and relax. I'm going to watch them. Won't see many more of them before we go," he said, throwing a lowering glance at his wife as he left the room. He returned in a few moments, however, before the two of them had had time to begin a conversation, and addressed Donald, "Sorry to interfere, promise I won't interrupt again. I'm sure you two are making just miles of progress and I dislike the role of an impedance, but a phrase just popped into my head and I'm sure I won't be able to concentrate on the fights properly until it's resolved. I wonder, Dr. Quink, if you could possibly tell me if this is the age that is so fond of saying that idiots walk with God? You know

what I mean, that they don't need their wit because God's hand is on their shoulder, so to speak, and that's why et cetera? - Childish, perhaps, but touching, don't you think?"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Fairfield," Victor replied, "but I hadn't heard the phrase before. Perhaps I'm just unfamiliar with it, or more probably you picked it up elsewhere on your travels."

"Mmmm," Donald answered, somewhat noncommittally, "perhaps. Well, don't let me detain you. I'll just run along. Vaya con Dios," he waved as he left the room. They waited a few seconds in silence, but he didn't return.

"Will you take him on as a patient?" Mimi asked when they heard the first roaring of the crowd from the living-room.

"I'd like to very much, if you want me to. He's a fascinating case. But it won't be easy, it's going to take time."

"Oh, that's all right," she assured him. "He's not dangerous, and we've plenty of money. Take all the time you want."

"You know," he said, "I don't mind admitting I'm pretty bewildered by now." He shook his head two or

three times, as if to clear it, then asked, "where does the money come from?"

"I don't know."

"I mean, what does he do for a living?"

"I don't know. Did you ask him?"

"Not yet. He'll probably say he brought the money from the future."

"Uh-huh," she agreed.

"Well, don't you even know where your husband gets his money?"

"No."

"What a combination you two are," he muttered.

"I can't hear you," she called from the kitchen. "The water is making too much noise. Come in here." He went in and leaned against the powder blue refrigerator while she soaked the dishes. "He won't come to your office for examinations or treatments," she said. "He thinks I'm the one who's nuts."

"That's probably true," he agreed, somewhat ambiguously. "It would be better if you were my patient at the same time. You do have this amnesia anyhow, I'd like to clear that up. Would you be willing?"

"Oh, I'd love it," she cried.

"I can come see you for regular treatments, and then you can come to the house for

supper several times a week and see him then."

"Let's go see if he agrees to that," Victor said. Mimi dried her hands in a hurry on a dish towel, grabbed a handful of his fingers, and pulled him after her to the living-room. Her fingers were still cool and damp.

He saw a lot of the two of them in the few weeks following that night, but he learned nothing more. Donald Fairfield was sulky and uncommunicative, muttering on-ly over and over again that he had already said too much and Lord knew what would become of him when he got back but he didn't see what else he could have done under the circumstances and no one else had ever gotten into such a fix why the hell did it have to happen to him, a quiet and thoughtful and considerate man who wouldn't swat a fly, or anyhow not a pregnant fly. This opened up an entire new line of discussion. Mimi didn't know, in reply to his query, whether flies got pregnant or not. At least, she had never seen one. Donald was forced into a short lecture, barely remembered from second year biology, but it seemed to satisfy them. "We don't have lower

forms of life at home, you know," Donald apologized.

On days when he didn't come to their home for supper, Mimi would have the last appointment of the day with him, and after her hour they would leave together, waking up Margaret before they left the office, stop off for cocktails before Mimi had to catch her train, miss the train, have dinner, miss the next train, catch a show or walk in the park, drive Mimi home, and finally part. They talked a lot, they talked seemingly without reserve, but Victor learned nothing new. Her life before that train ride was simply a blank.

"I'd like to try hypnosis," Victor said to her one day in his office.

"No," she replied.

He was surprised. "I don't think you understand," he said. "I want to hypnotize you and try to take you back before that train ride, back to your childhood—"

"No," she said.

"It's perfectly safe," he said.

She filed a rough edge off her nail, second finger, right hand.

"It's standard analytic procedure. I've used it dozens of times. I'm quite competent—"

"No," she said.

"But why not?" he asked.

"You'll find out all about me," she said. "I'll have no secrets left."

"But you shouldn't want to have any secrets from your psychoanalyst. I can't help you then."

"Perhaps," she agreed. "But I want to have secrets from you," she said softly, and looked up quietly from her fingers, staring directly into his eyes, and her lips and her eyes underwent that mysterious synchronization once again. "I don't want you to know me like a book, with everything spelled out in black and white, but like a portrait, with hidden shades and nuances . . . I want you to know me gradually, slowly . . ."

"Mimi," he said, and paused. He pushed back from his desk, swiveled completely around and back to his original position, cracked two knuckles, tried to force some saliva into a suddenly dry mouth, and started to speak again. "Mimi, it's not unusual for a patient to develop a feeling of affection for her psychoanalyst. In fact, it's the usual—"

"It's not like that with us, though, is it?" she asked, more quietly, more softly and deeply, than before.

After a long pause he said, "No. No, it's not."

And so they sat there while the daylight faded outside them and the twilight crawled up sixty-three floors to encircle their window and continue unhesitatingly upward.

"What are we going to do?" she asked.

"We're not going to do anything, Mimi," he finally said. "When I'm with you, it's all so light and fantastic and funny, that I forget. But it would be unforgiveable to fall in love with a patient, and the wife of a patient. I can't do it. We'll have to stop right away. I'm no good as an analyst to you anymore, anyway. I'm sorry, I'll send you to someone else. And now you'd better go."

She stood up, walked around his desk, and put her hands lightly on his neck. "You're such a dear," she said. "I'll always love you. I've never seen you so serious before. We always laugh and talk and giggle when we're together, and I loved you then. But now that you're sad and serious and oh so pitifully tragic I love you more than I could ever tell you. But please don't worry, don't worry about a thing, darling. You'll see, it will all work out."

"It can't work out, Mimi, there's absolutely no way on earth for it to work out. There's no solution at all."

"Please don't worry, darling," she said, picking up her gloves. "I can't bear to see you looking so tragic. Life isn't so serious, especially as you're loved." She walked out and closed the door behind her. Victor sat quite still. He could barely hear her saying "Margaret, wake up, Margaret, it's time to go home," through the thick wooden door.

The phone rang in his office three days later. He was alone at the time, going over some notes he had just taken with another patient. Margaret was out, presumably peering through the floor of the ladies' lounge down the hall, and he picked up the receiver himself.

"Victor, come quick," Mimi screamed through the wires. "He's trying to kill me!"

She said more, but he heard none of it. His fingers went numb, the phone dropped, he was out of his seat and skidding around the desk before it hit the carpeted floor. He had to wait at the elevator. He thought for one silly moment of racing to the exit and running down sixty-three floors,

then compromised on stamping his feet and slamming one fist into the other palm and striding up and down while three other men and two women also waiting for the elevator stared at him. He thought of calling the police just as the elevator door opened, and he nearly turned and left it, but couldn't and leaped in just as the doors were closing. "I'm Dr. Quink," he shouted at the elevator operator. "This is an emergency. Take me straight down."

The elevator went straight down. The doors opened on the ground floor and Victor shot out, leaving behind two nearly mortally sick women and several acid comments to the effect that he was probably late for a matinee. "I couldn't take any chances," apologized the elevator operator, "it might really have *been* an emergency."

It wasn't raining in New York that day, so he was able to get a cab immediately. He took it to his parking lot and roared off from there. He sped through the city traffic, incurring the widespread wrath and disapproval of the police department. A patrol car caught up with him on Grand Central Parkway and forced him off the road. He explained who he was and that a mad-

man was threatening to kill his wife, no, not *his* wife, the madman's wife, and that he didn't have time to sit here and talk about it. The police officer told him to follow him, and, siren blazing, they roared off once again.

It occurred to both of them nearly simultaneously that Victor couldn't possibly follow the police officer, it had to be the other way around, and so Victor took the lead, the red siren hanging on behind. But when Victor left the parkway he saw in his mirror no flashing red light, somewhere he had lost the police. He touched the brake a second, for the first time in the past fifteen minutes, then accelerated again and hurried on. He had not the time to wait.

The door to the Fairfield's home was unlocked and he burst in without ringing. "Mimi," he cried, then, hearing vague noises from the upstairs bedroom, he hurried there.

He didn't find Mimi there. Donald Fairfield was alone in the bedroom, and the bedroom was a mess, and there was a gun in Donald Fairfield's hand.

Victor stopped in the doorway, a gas pain shooting up his side. He thought at that

moment, inanely, he should play more handball.

"Galileo," Donald Fairfield said, "it came to me just a few moments ago. Galileo. It was on the tip of my tongue all the time, I just couldn't think of it. What were we saying about him, do you remember? What brought it up?"

Victor braced himself up against the doorway, breathing hard. He stared at the gun in Donald's hand. Donald followed his gaze down his side to the gun, and seemed surprised when he saw it. "Oh, yes. She's in the bathroom," he said, waving his gun towards the closed door. "She's locked the door."

Victor belched.

"For God's sake," said Donald. "There's a time and a place for everything."

Victor crossed to the door. "Mimi," he called. "Mimi, it's me, Victor."

The lock clicked, the door opened, and Mimi walked out and folded herself into his arms. He held her until she stopped shaking, then until he himself stopped shaking and until his breath came more easily. He kept all the while his back toward Donald and the gun, and his arms folded around her so that she was safe from him. Then he turned and calmly as he could, he ask-

ed what in the holy hell was going on.

"He wants me to go back with him, right now," Mimi said. She was shivering in his arms. "I'm not going, I'm not going with him."

"Of course, you're not," Victor said. He turned back to Donald. "What's the rush all of a sudden?" he asked. "What's the big emergency?" he smiled.

"Don't turn on the personality, Dr. Quink," Fairfield said. "It's too complicated to explain, but time's run out on us. We've got to go tonight, and I'm taking her with me dead or alive, I don't give a damn which way anymore, she's coming with me dead or alive."

Victor let go of Mimi and took a step toward him, but the hand with the gun came up and gun was pointed straight at him, and the voice was flat and tired and desperate, "I can't leave her here, you can see what it would mean. They're very strict about time traveling, they have to be, and she can't stay here. She hasn't lost her memory, she knows damned well where she comes from, and she's going back now, one way or the other. I don't know what'll happen to me when we get back if I kill her, but it's

my decision and I can't let her stay behind, no matter what." His voice started to rise and the words began to come faster. He was working himself up dangerously near the breaking point.

"If you'll just calm down for a few moments," Victor tried, "I'm sure we can talk this out sensibly enough."

"It won't work, Dr. Quink, it won't work. You're trying to talk it out like I'm nuts, you're trying to reassure me, but it won't work because you can't. Because I'm *not* nuts! I'm telling the truth and she knows it! Damn you, Mimi, tell him!"

"All right! All right, I'll tell him," she cried. "And I'll tell you, too. And I'm not going back with you, you'll see. Because I planned this from the start. My God, what a day," she sighed, and sat down on the bed. "Now listen, both of you, you, too, Donald, because you don't know it all either."

"He's not crazy, Victor, we do come from the future. I was reading about all the Nobel prize winners, darling, and of course, I came across you, and right from the beginning you fascinated me. Do you know you were the first psychiatrist ever to win the

award, and then you won it twice? Oh, I can tell you, I was terribly impressed! And when I saw your picture, you know the one, the portrait by Videl in the Museum of Ancient—oh, but of course, it hasn't been done yet. You have gray sideburns then, and there's not a touch of gray in your hair now. Anyway, you look absolutely distinguished with gray, it's certainly your color. And I thought you were just the handsomest Nobel winner I had ever seen, and darling, you are, not the slightest doubt about it. Don't you think so, Donald?"

"He's charming," Donald replied. "Just terribly, terribly charming. Would you mind getting on with it?"

"Please," Victor started to interrupt.

"Don't be modest, darling," Mimi went on. "So then I read a biography, and then another, and soon I was doing nothing but studying you. I fell in love with you, dear, I fell in love with you a thousand years after you were dead. You never married, you know, and you needed me, and I guess that helped, but at any rate I fell, and I fell all the way.

"We're not married, Donald and I. There's no sex then, so there's no need for marriage.

Right, Donald? Right. But he was coming here on vacation and he was nice enough to take me along, and we had to fit in, so we came as husband and wife. Just a matter of convenience, really. But then we were here for all those months, and I didn't get to meet you, and something about this age just got into my bones, I loved it so, people really *live* now, not like back home. And I nearly forgot about you, Victor dear, although I can't understand that now, and all I wanted was to live here like a normal person, a normal wife. But *he* couldn't understand that. At any rate, I went native, I went whole hog native.

"And then it was time to go home. But I wasn't going. So I made up this story about forgetting everything and I pretended I thought he was nuts or something and he went and got you and suddenly there you were in my living room and it all came back, darling, it came back so fast and strong I thought I'd die on the spot. And I love you now, darling, I love you now and forever, and I won't go back alive, I swear that."

"Mimi," Donald begged, "think of the future. If you don't go back it'll be all upset.

We can't have people just popping up in the past from the future, there has to be discipline. It's one thing to come here quietly for a few months of harmless vacation, and then just as quietly to disappear. But to settle down brazenly in another time, to . . . to immigrate, as it were, well, it just can't be done. There's no precedent, just none at all. Nobody would think of doing such a thing. Why, who knows what would happen if you stayed here? It could upset the whole pattern of the future!"

"The future will just have to take care of itself," Mimi answered. "I love him, and you can't argue with that. There's nothing you can say that can argue with that. I don't care poof for the future."

Victor sat down quietly on the edge of the bed, he felt a bit weak around the general vicinity of the knees. Mimi stood up and strode over to the window, her back to the conversation. "Mimi," Donald pleaded, "just think of what you're doing. You'll lose your immortality, for one thing. You know, it's not something you're just *born* with, it's the result of careful medical science. Why, almost *anything*

could happen to you here. They have all *sorts* of ugly diseases. And if you should last just a few years longer, just maybe fifty or sixty more years, your heart will almost certainly pop off. They don't have any sort of arterial rejuvenation now, nothing at all. You're trading immortality for a mere *moment*."

"I don't give a damn or a wild pig's snort," she replied.

"Don't be vulgar," Donald said. "Let's keep this on a civilized plane."

"That's not vulgarity," she answered. "It's poetry. I don't give a damn or a wild pig's snort, but you cut just one strand and the fashions be damned, I swear that I'll boil three in lime!"

"Lime?" Victor asked rather weakly.

"I think so, dear," Mimi said. "Would you care for a martini?"

"How about the toilet!" Donald suddenly thundered. "How about *that*, hey?"

"I beg your pardon," Mimi replied.

"The toilets, the toilets," he repeated impatiently. "Do you want to spend the rest of your short life with this old-fashioned plumbing? he waved wildly toward the tile bathroom. "It's all right roughing it for a few months like we

did, but can you honestly imagine spending the rest of your *life* under such vile conditions? Ha, you didn't think of that, did you?" he continued when he saw the sudden stricken expression on her face. "You don't like the idea, do you?"

Mimi clenched her fists at her side and stamped her little foot. "I don't *care*," she spit out, "I absolutely do not care! I will stay with him, I will, I will, I *will*." She turned and looked at the bathroom that opened off the bedroom, and blanched for one moment, then she shut her eyes, gave another kick, and insisted, "I will, I will, I will!"

Donald sighed and slapped his hands at his side. He turned around, hesitated for a few seconds, then said to the wall, "I've tried. I've tried everything I could think of." He turned again and faced them, and he raised his gun. "You're coming, Mimi. One way or another, you're coming."

So quietly he hardly realized what he was doing, but thankful that the gas pain had vanished, Victor stepped between the gun and the girl. "You'll have to kill me, Donald," he said. "You won't take her out of here without killing me, I promise you that, and

what will that do to your future? A man from the future killing somebody here? Oh, no, that'll upset everything. And before I've become famous? Your whole history will be changed. You'd better think twice, Donald."

The gun wavered, and lowered.

"Would you care for a martini, Donald, dear?" Mimi asked.

Donald turned and ran from the room. They heard his feet slipping down the stairs, they heard the front door slam behind him.

Victor started after him, but Mimi held him back. "What are you going to do," she cried, "chase after him? What will you do when you catch him? You're needed more here. After all," she continued, "think what I just went through? I'm a nervous wreck, almost getting carted off to God knows where like that. I need the care of a competent physician."

He turned back to her in a daze, she clucked and patted his cheek, and pushed him down onto the bed. She pulled out his handkerchief and mopped his face. "Aren't you proud of me?" she said. "Wasn't that fast thinking? How did you like that little story I told? It really threw

him, didn't it? He didn't know *what* to think."

"You mean," Victor stammered, "you mean you didn't mean it, you just made it up? Just like that?"

"Darling," she began to giggle, "you didn't *believe* that wild story? About the future? Oh, *darling*, you couldn't possibly believe it."

"Of course not," he said. "Of course not. Quick thinking, Mimi, yes, very quick thinking. It *was* a convincing story, you know. Very good. But, my God! I've got to catch him."

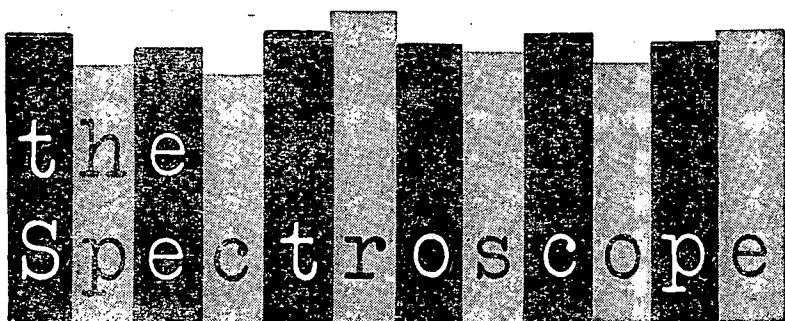
"Don't be silly," she said, pushing him down. "You'll never find him, you'll never see him again. He'll be lost in the crowd. One more screwball in New York, they'll never notice him. He'll fit right in. He may even become President some day, or at least Dean of Students at some small New England College. You just take my word for it, darling, and relax a moment. I'll rush downstairs and bring

you up a martini. We deserve one. He'll be all right now. As long as he's made up his mind that he can leave me here, he'll trot off somewhere and dig up another neurosis, or psychosis, or whatever. He's not dangerous anymore. And you heard him say we were never married, and we have no marriage certificate, so I guess we're not. Can't we just forget about him, just as if he never existed? Maybe he never *did* exist. Maybe he was just a figment of our imagination. Maybe he was just an instrument of kismet to bring us together. Maybe he was just a wandering minstrel, or a memory looking for a chance to be real?"

"Maybe you'd better not talk so much, but just bring up the martini. Better bring a pitcher. Green ones."

And so she did. Their first honeymoon they spent in Bermuda; they took their second on a trip to Sweden ten years later, when Victor went to accept his first Nobel prize.

THE END



the Spectroscope

by S. E. COTTS

THE GLORY THAT WAS. *By L. Sprague de Camp. 223 pp. Avalon Books. \$2.95.*

This is an engaging spoof written with quite a light touch. It has both obvious and subtle humor, and therefore should appeal to all readers, regardless of their perceptiveness. At first glance, the victim of the satire appears to be Classical Greece in the Golden Age of Pericles. But behind this, the author is really poking fun at those people who have idealized certain ages of history to the extent of wishing they had been born then and could re-live those times. De Camp capitalizes further on this idea by making Wiyem Flin, the Classical Greek scholar in question, so inept and unable to take care of himself when he finds himself back in his heart's desire, that his unscholarly companion, Knut Bulnes, has to attend to the simple matters of food and clothing once they arrive. This situation might seem to inspire further spoofs on eggheads and scholars, but these worthies are saved from too bad a ribbing by the fact that the setting turns out not to be Classical Greece at all.

As an additional bonus, the book has an introduction which is really a short essay by Robert Heinlein on a subject that is very close to this reviewer's heart—the place of humor in science fiction.

METHUSELAH'S CHILDREN. *By Robert A. Heinlein. 160 pp. Signet Books. Paper: 35¢.*

Speaking of Heinlein, he is represented on his own this month, as well as in de Camp's introduction. This is a reprint of a book that first appeared two years ago. This reviewer missed it at the time but is very glad to have caught up with it because it is top rank science fiction, worthy to stand next to his other fine novels.

Among the many virtues of this Heinlein book, two are especially noteworthy. The first is a plot of real distinction, both in the idea

and in the working out. Living on Earth at that time were members of the Families, like their neighbors in every way except for one thing—they were extremely long-lived. This good fortune, however, was not the result of any great miracle drug, but the natural outgrowth of very careful mating over a number of centuries under the encouragement and protection of the Howard Foundation. When the normal people on Earth learn of this near-immortality in their midst, there is rioting and violence directed against any suspected of belonging to one of the Families. Because the short-lived people don't believe that this gift cannot be transferred to them, the Families are forced to flee to the stars on an untested ship. Unfortunately, the adventures they meet there are not so restful, either.

The second point of excellence is in the character Lazarus Long, a black sheep member of the Families, whose actions are responsible for goading his doomed colleagues to escape from Earth. He has many adventures, all of them logically motivated by his well-defined personality. His moods run from cranky to courageous, but in all of them the author has made him seem very real and likeable, no mean feat when you consider he is 213 years old at the start of the book.

The only objection to the novel comes in the form of a compliment—an enjoyable reading experience always seems too short.

STAR SCIENCE FICTION #6. *Edited by Frederik Pohl. 156 pp. Ballantine Books. Paper: 35¢.*

This collection, the sixth in Mr. Pohl's very worthwhile series is not as good as its predecessors. Yet, I would say it is still a must for all those interested in science fiction, and particularly those who want a glimpse of one of the major trends in the field, if this sampling is taken to be as at all representative. Here is an anthology that does not contain a single story whose basic concern is mechanical or scientific gadgets or space exploration. These are people-centered stories, people whose strangeness is more of the mind than the body, people with extraordinary gifts or weaknesses or tendencies. Some of the tales could well serve, though perhaps unintentionally, as a warning that science knows even less about people than rockets; a reminder that there is just as much unexplained about our own natures as about the Solar System.

On the debit side, however, the stories as continuous narratives are not really as interesting as this bare description might have led a reader to expect. It almost seems as if words could not yet be mustered to explain such imaginings without being either self-conscious or obscure.



Or so you say

Dear Editor:

What's been happening to *Amazing* lately? Well, maybe I shouldn't criticize just *Amazing*, but the general run of science fiction magazines. It used to be where you could pick up a magazine, enjoy a nice long editorial, a review of the fanzines, ten or twelve pages of letters, long book reviews or maybe other features that made you feel you really belonged to the magazine. Nowadays it just isn't there. Sure, the stories are what really count and *Amazing* has improved in that category. Since *Imagination* (not the later issues, but the earlier ones) *Thrilling Wonder Stories*, *Startling* and a few other s-f mags ceased publication, who is left to carry on the fine traditions of science fiction fandom? Why not raise *your* magazine to 50¢, add more pages, and give us back some of the old features that really *made* a science fiction magazine! Give us more letters, longer book reviews, fanzine reviews, etc.

You could make Amazing better!

Zenny Hybke
318 Marquette St.
LaSalle, Illinois

• *With room for maybe one or two stories, too?*

Dear Editor:

Why don't you improve your magazine? Maybe you want to reduce your sales by making your magazine crummy. If that is what you want, it seems as if you are succeeding in this town.

I think you ought to keep the novels. I never used to like them but if they keep being as good as they have been, I say keep them.

I think you ought to get more illustrations. Make sure they are good. Try to get Finlay to do about three for the novel and get somebody *good* for one illustration for each short story. Get better covers also. They seem to be getting better now, so keep it up.

I think you ought to drop a couple of short stories so you can get more illustrations, and also longer editorials and book reviews. Also, you ought to have a couple of autobiographies of authors, artists, editors, and maybe even book reviewers with a picture of each. I would like this because I am naturally inquisitive and I imagine other people are too. Keep the letters.

With these "improvements" you would have your own individuality for sure and you ought to be more appealing to the people buying.

Gregory Millman
660 Eighth Street
LaSalle, Illinois

• *We bet you tell this to all the editors.*

Dear Editor:

I think that the story "Star Surgeon" in the December issue of *Amazing* is one of the best s-f stories I have ever read. It was very interesting and heartwarming. I hope Alan Nourse will continue to write wonderful stories like that.

I think your magazine is tops. Keep up the good stories.

Alan Long
17 Webster Ave.
Aurora, Illinois

Dear Editor:

All right. The biggest issues in the last six months of *Amazing* are E. E. Smith and Eric Frank Russell. I said in a previous letter that I didn't like Smith but I did Russell. That's all I said. Everybody else has been pen burning paper on these two topics so I want a word, too.

I'm no old fan, not by a long shot, but I've crammed more s-f reading into the last five years than most fans have in twenty. I know all about modern s-f, and being a collector I know as much about the "good old days" as any scientifan.

Mr. Smith, in several of his old stories, makes his characters act as dumb as dodos when confronted with an alien race. It makes you sick. But in the last few pages said earthlings become sage fellows, outwitting the extraterrestrials at every trick. Fair maiden is rescued—they live happily ever after. Smitty has improved, somewhat. Sure, the s-f of today is the fact of tomorrow. My complaint is that Smith doesn't even make good reading (referring mainly to "The Galaxy Primes.")

Actually, there is no use arguing about it. Either you like his writing, or you don't. I don't. Period.

I was somewhat shocked upon finishing Mr. Russell's article, "Stargazers," and its companion, "And Who The Pot?" Having for five years studied most faithfully for a career in astronomy, you can imagine my reaction upon finishing these two pieces. Now, I agree with him. I didn't take his word on any sentence, though. For hours I poured through science texts, encyclopedias, etc., checking every minute detail. My conclusion: Mr. Russell knows what he is talking about. Astronomy is uncertain and self-contradicting. Opposing theories occupy the same space at the same time, much too often. Sure, maybe if enough people go into the field, it could be straightened out, but it's not for me. The idea of a career in astronomy just doesn't jell, and for that fact astronomy itself doesn't.

These are not street-corner decisions, for as I said, I've spent hours and days on end checking, reading and discussing.

I wish to thank Mr. Russell for writing the articles and *Amazing* for publishing them.

Keep improving. *Amazing* is bypassing the terrific quality it had in 1953.

David Locke
P. O. Box 207
Indian Lake, N. Y.

• What are you going to be, now?

Dear Editor:

"Transient" by Ward Moore stinks. Stories like this are the reason I no longer buy *Fantastic*—put this kind of story in *Fantastic* for those who like this type.

Dr. William H. Robey
Steelville, Missouri

Dear Editor:

I have read s-f since the tender age of five. I have read and enjoyed every issue of *Amazing*. And yet in my own not so humble opinion, no story to see print in the past ten years or so seems more deserving of the overworked title classic than Ward Moore's memorable "Transient." Sheer unblushing fantasy, sure, but for beautiful and terrifying concepts this seems to be in a class by itself. Within the range of its subject matter only C. S. Lewis' "Perelandra" seems comparable. High praise indeed, but well deserved.

Mr. Moore's "Bring the Jubilee" was of classic proportions in its own right. His shorter item "Lot" is still remembered with awe. So naturally any appearance of a new story from him is eagerly awaited. Even though the intervals between his stories are much too long, the wait is well worth it. Like Doc Smith he simply doesn't write often enough for his numerous fans. But his utter craftsmanship in the art of writing forgives the long delays.

I agree wholeheartedly with Mike Deckinger's comment that you should give the new authors a chance to display their talents. But don't overlook the old timers either. Just for a few suggestions, is it possible to get Jack Vance to write a sequel to his "The Dying Earth"? How about a Hannes Bok sequel to "The Blue Flamingo," or another "Sorcerers Ship"? And what are the chances of getting Harold M. Sherman to write again for you? Anyone who remembers "The Green Man Returns," or "This Way to Heaven" will heartily endorse this suggestion I am sure. There were some great ones in the olden days, so let's bring them back if it is possible.

But I don't have any complaints. After this latest issue it would be the height of ingratitude to do anything like that. *Amazing* is once again something to eagerly look forward to, and since you seem to know what to do by yourself, these comments can be considered and

...OR SO YOU SAY

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acted on if deserving, with the knowledge that a good many fans will support whatever you do. This past year should have proved that.

Clayton Hamlin
28 Earle Ave.
Bangor, Maine

• *Thanks. We'll keep those suggestions in mind.*

Dear Editor:

In reading Ward Moore's story "Transient," my natural curiosity leads me to ask, "in which mental institution is Mr. Moore presently incarcerated?"

It appears to me as though he has dumped the Thesaurus into a mixing bowl, sprinkled in his own version of Alice In Wonderland, stirred the abominal mixture vigorously and sprayed the mess onto paper.

If Mr. Moore cooks in the same manner he writes, the poor man must suffer greatly from gastritis.

I read and enjoy your publication regularly, but the bill of fare will be much more appetizing if, in the future, "S-F a la Moore" is deleted from the menu.

Dave Brown
Studio City, California

• *Who says we print only the complimentary letters?*

Dear Editor:

I could say that I've been an avid reader of *Amazing* for thirty years, but I won't because it isn't true. I have read it for

nearly four years though, and I feel that it's time I let you know what I think of the magazine. All in all, the issues I've read, with few exceptions, were excellent.

I just finished reading the January issue, and it isn't up to par. Fritz Leiber's novel is the worst that I've ever read in *Amazing*, or anywhere else for that matter, in quite a while. I can't see any reason for his writing a novel about that specific time and place. The only thing it conveys to me is a few incidents in the lives of three people. As far as I can see, there is no logical plot to the story. But editors are supposed to know more about what fans like than the fans themselves. We never had it so good, did we? (Well, you all printed it; and I didn't like it, so I guess I am an abnormal fan because of that.)

"Impact" was, by far, the best, in my opinion. "The Perfectionist" was next, and the others ran about the same. I think it was still pretty good for an average s-f magazine (but not for *Amazing*) in spite of the novel. You can do better.

Just when is the sequel to "Hunters Out of Time" coming? I've been looking forward to seeing it ever since you said the author was working on it, but I've almost given up hope of ever seeing it.

Wayne Cheek
Gibson Station, Va.

• *The "Hunters" sequel appears next month.*

Dear Editor:

As a not particularly long reader, three years, of your magazine, I don't feel that I should criticize your editing. However, I really cannot see any purpose in printing Ward Moore's "Transient" as science fiction.

"Transient" appears to have been written as incoherently as a delirious person's ravings. It *was* interesting, I'll grant you that, but I don't feel that it was science fiction, and that is why I buy *Amazing*.

I do want to thank you for your lovely covers, I enjoyed the purple unicorn and the lack of beautiful women, in various stages of undress, being clutched by monsters. I don't mind monsters, but I do mind buying a magazine which looks like some lurid sex paperback. I find it very embarrassing and usually end up hiding covers like that by book-cover protectors. If you need sex to get readers, you are not publishing science fiction.

Pamela Dian de Journo
5409 Fisher-Mary Markley
University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Mich.

• So you don't think that unicorn cover was sexy, eh? Ever hear the one about the unicorns and the virgins?

Dear Editor:

I have only been reading your magazines for three months now (Nov., Dec., Jan. issues of *Amazing*, Jan. *Fantastic*). Since you were the first s-f magazine I

have read I thought I might as well write you. Because I am only fourteen years old I don't know if my tastes coincide with others but here is my opinion.

I don't care much for *Amazing's* short stories. They stink. However, *Fantastic* makes up for it with darn good stories.

Amazing's novels are all pretty good, although I would *not* call them perfect. However, Nourse's "Star Surgeon" is worthy of note. Of course, I am probably prejudiced since my dad is a doctor.

I can't find too much wrong with *Fantastic*. It is the best of the two magazines. I think it should have a book review section. *Amazing* only covers three books, so it wouldn't be a bad idea to cover a few more books in *Fantastic*.

I think that your editorials are much too short.

The best feature of your magazines is the letters department. I really enjoy reading it.

I hope you don't mind my crack about your short stories, but how are you to know what people think of your magazine and where to improve unless you are told.

Your magazines are better than most I have sampled. With a little more work you can become the best.

John Olenski
8 Henrietta St.
Brantford, Ont.

• Quite right, Johnny. How are we to know they stink unless you say so?

...OR SO YOU SAY

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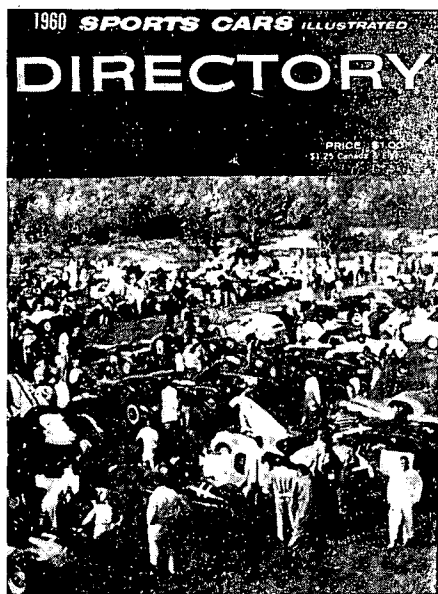
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